

RETRO | CURRENT GEN | INDIE | TABLETOP | TOYS

# FUSION



ISSUE 35    £3.99

FUSION

[WWW.FUSIONRETROBOOKS.COM](http://WWW.FUSIONRETROBOOKS.COM)



# CONTENTS

- 4 **Antstream Arcade**  
Point & Click Adventures
- 10 **Transformers**
- 12 **Retcon Gaming Festival**
- 16 **Review : Shredder's Revenge**  
Retro Faith reviews this new fighting game
- 22 **Toys That Became  
Movie Props**
- 32 **Lego Star Wars**
- 38 **Musical Marvels**
- 40 **I Can't Buy the Game I  
Want to Buy**
- 42 **How (And Why) I Learned  
to Play Games With One  
Hand**
- 45 **Metal Slug**
- 48 **Super Stages Special**  
Part 2 of our interview with Michael John
- 53 **Nintendo's Retro Revival**
- 56 **Review : Asteroids RX**



For your monthly retro fix, join..

## FUSION

Retro-gaming  
Publisher  
since 2006



[www.patreon.com/fusionmagazine](https://www.patreon.com/fusionmagazine)



# FUSION



I'm writing this whilst on a work trip, my first outside the country since the start of the Pandemic. Having to sit on a plane for hours has given me the excuse to get reacquainted with my Switch again; I'm wondering why I had left it on the shelf for so long?

The first game I wanted to play was *Lego Star Wars: Skywalker Saga*. I had already completed the main game, but there were so many side quests, secrets and collectables to find that by the time the low battery warning appeared on screen, I was halfway through my flight. Giving my Switch a drink from my power bank allowed me to jump into some Mario Kart, a sublime racing game on the Wii U but perfected on Nintendo's handheld system.

Both games reminded me (again) what a fabulous system the Switch is. Yes, I know many people might (rightly) argue that there are too many first-party remakes and re-releases. Look past Nintendo's games, and you'll find a treasure trove of incredible games that work perfectly on the console. Dig deeper into the games available on the Nintendo store, and there is hidden gem after hidden gem. If you have the patience to wait for a sale, you'll have no excuse not to fill up the Switch's storage with some cracking games. Should you have holidays planned or a long trip coming up, grab yourself a Switch, and a few games, then enjoy what gaming on the move should be about.

This month, you are reading issue thirty-five of Fusion; I'm still amazed that this little spark of an idea is still going strong. But Fusion is not our magazine; it belongs just as much to you, our wonderful readers. We love feedback, good or bad - if you have views on the mag, drop us a note and, of course, enjoy the issue.

Editor in Chief : Chris Wilkins

Editor: Alan Hammerton

Layout: Ben Honebone / Alan Hammerton

Cover : Trevor Storey

Contributions from:

Retro Faith, Paul Henderson, Ben Honebone,  
George Sturgeon, Paul Twist, Toy Polloi, Sparky,  
Ceri Roberts, Ryan Coleman & Ben Magnet

Editor  
Alan Hammerton





# Antstream<sup>®</sup> ARCADE



## Point & Click



**Above:** Guybrush sweet talking the local wildlife with his silver tongue has aged well and still raises a smile thirty years later.

### WE'RE GOING ON AN ADVENTURE! PAUL HENDERSON SWAPS THE JOYSTICK FOR A MOUSE AND PUTS HIS THINKING CAP ON

■ Up to now, we've covered many retro classics on the Antstream Arcade service, as well as a bunch of more recent homebrew favourites, most of which are arcade-style games. Antstream has far more going on beneath the surface, though. This

month we'll be looking at some of the LucasArts point-and-click adventures available on the service, thanks to the partnership between Antstream and Disney made early in 2021. Who said Antstream couldn't bring the big guns on board? Antstream Arcade can be downloaded for free from [Antstream.com](https://antstream.com).

#### **The Secret of Monkey Island (Amiga)**

First on the list is arguably the

most iconic point-and-click adventure ever made, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, which was instrumental in launching the point-and-click adventure genre into popularity. Taking control of Guybrush Threepwood on his quest to become a pirate, you'll enter a world of swashbuckling adventure, insult sword-fighting, crazy and memorable characters, and a wicked sense of humour that the game would become notorious for. Interestingly, it's the Amiga version included on Antstream. While some will prefer the VGA PC version, it's likely that for many





Above: Bereft of input to respond to, Bernard began staring deep into the abyss.

### Day of the Tentacle (DOS)

*Day of the Tentacle* is the sequel to *Maniac Mansion*, which revolutionised the graphic adventure genre in 1987 and was the first to use the SCUMM engine. In this sequel, you control Bernard Bernoulli and his friends, Hoagie and Laverne, in a time-travelling adventure as you try to stop the evil Purple Tentacle from taking over the world. The protagonists soon find themselves in the past, present, and future. Many puzzles involve manipulating the timelines; a tree cut down in the past will be gone in the future. As with *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle* includes a verb list to select various actions but was the last of these games to

do this. *Day of the Tentacle* also contains the original *Maniac Mansion*; this can be accessed at a certain point in the main game and is a nice little bonus.

### Sam & Max Hit The Road (DOS)

Based on the American comic strip characters, *Sam & Max Hit the Road* sees the protagonists Sam and Max as the “Free-lance Police” trying to solve the disappearance of Bruno the Bigfoot and Trixie the Giraffe Necked Girl. The case takes them on a journey through various popular tourist locations as they track down Bruno and Trixie. It’s incredibly well presented, with great cartoon-like graphics and a streamlined interface compared to previous

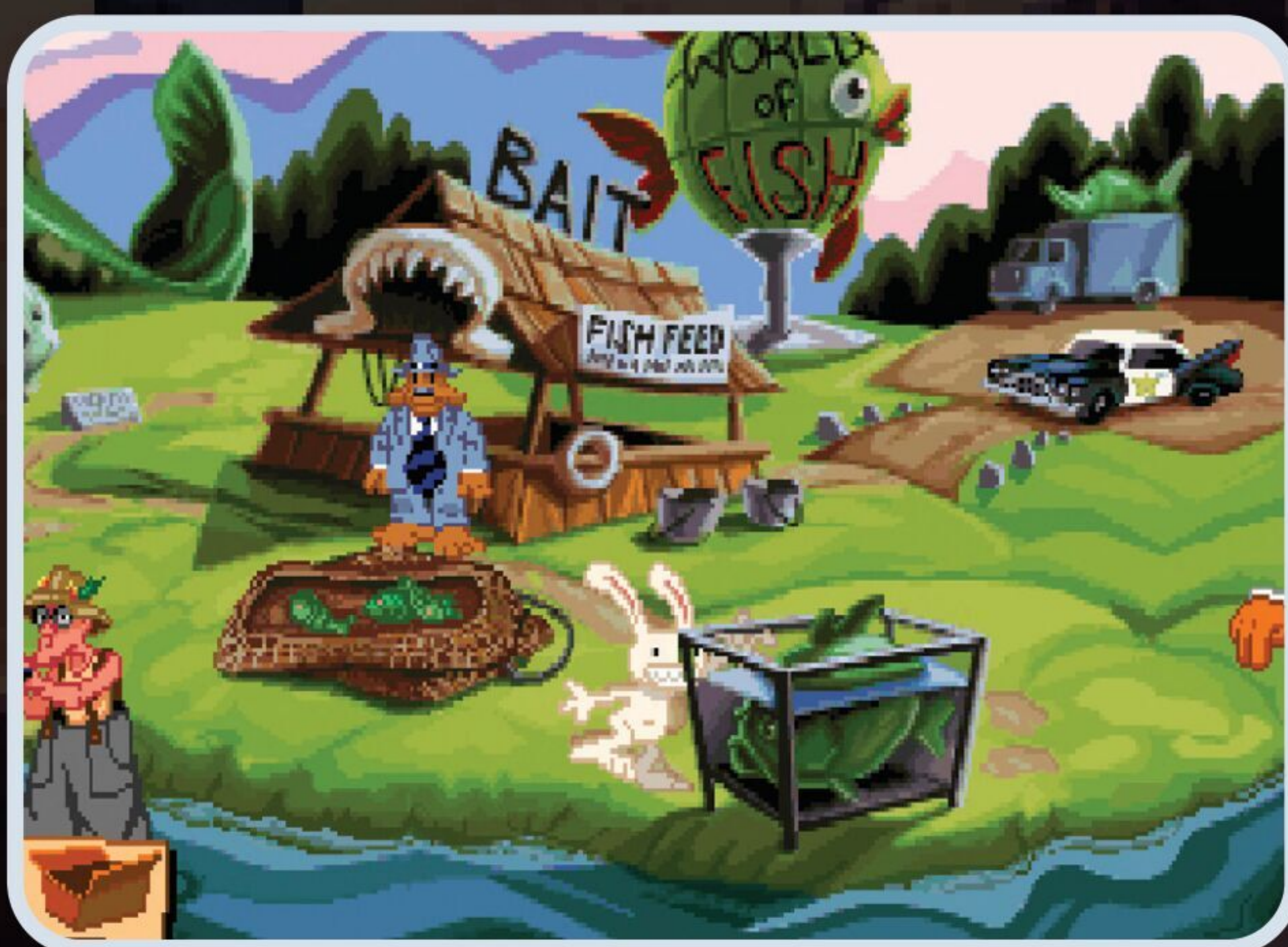
people, it’s the Amiga version that introduced them to the world of *Monkey Island*. Hence, it’s great there’s now an easy way to play the Amiga version of the game without requiring an emulator or an actual Amiga.



titles. Judging purely ingame terms, *Sam & Max* isn't without flaws; some of the puzzles are bordering on the absurd, as is the story, but that is pretty much the whole point. What you've got here is one hell of a comic ride with ridiculous scenes and crazy characters that deliver memorable gags, one-liners, and opportunities for madcap humour unlike anything else. The characters of *Sam* and *Max* will have you clicking on everything just to see what amusing reactions you get from them. It's an eccentric, wacky trip with what is still a pretty decent game wrapped up in all the chaos. All these things seamlessly combined make *Sam & Max* deserving of legendary status.

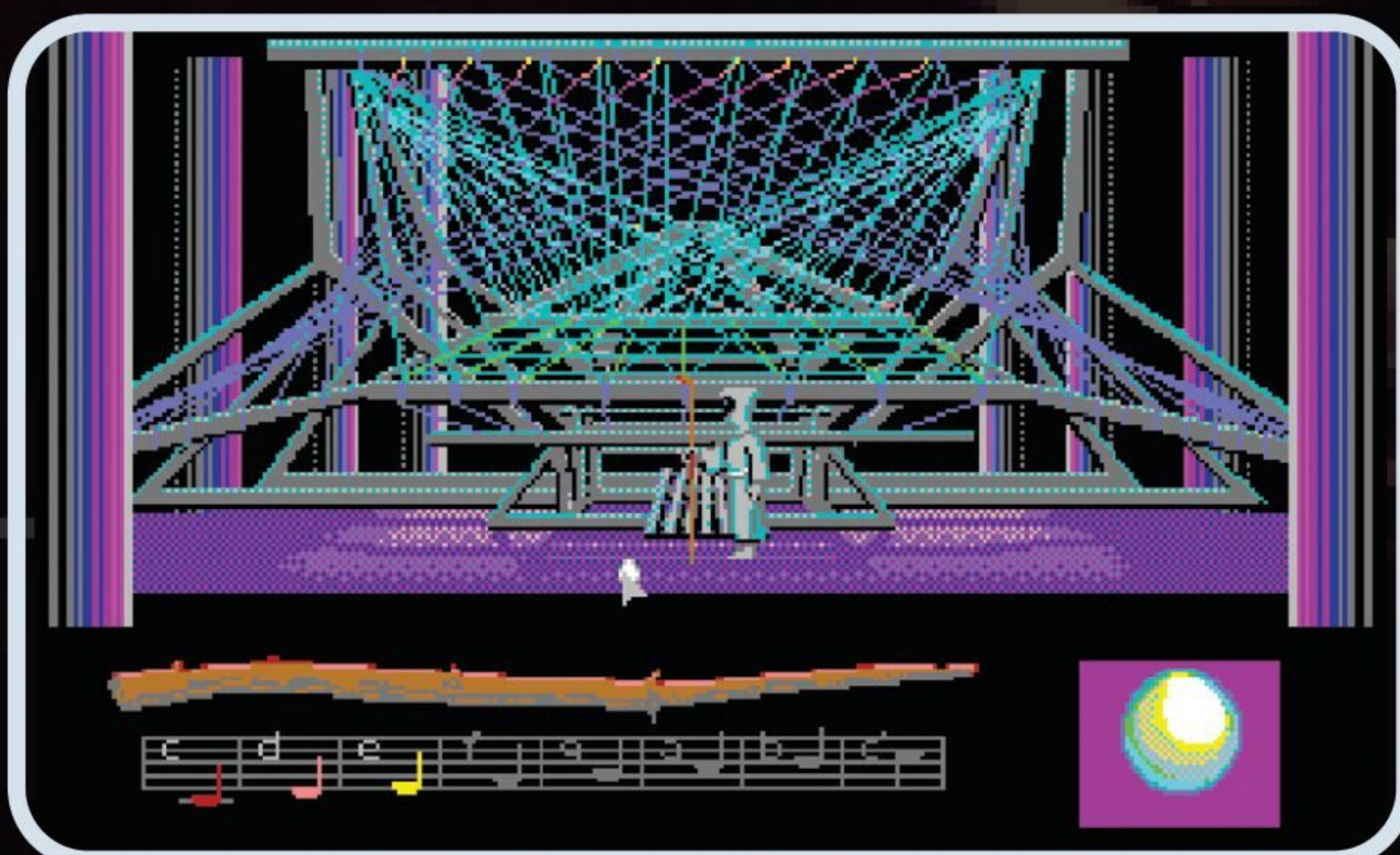
### Loom (Amiga)

One of the more intriguing games utilising the SCUMM engine, *Loom* sees you as Bobbin Threadbare, a member of the enigmatic Guild of Weavers. He is summoned by the Guild elders, only to witness a bizarre sequence of events setting him off on an epic adventure. This game differs from other LucasArts adventures in that there are no conventional commands besides clicking to move. Everything else is done via magic, which in *Loom* consists of weaving spells, or drafts, using a magical musical staff. Each draft consists of four notes. You'll discover different drafts with varying effects throughout the game and learn additional notes that allow you to weave more complex drafts. The entire game is based around solving puzzles using this musical magic; it's



Above: Sam & Max taking a stroll through various respectable Welsh villages.

Below: *Loom* takes a minimalistic approach to graphics with beautiful results.







Above: Casting magical musical spells in *Loom*.



Above: Diverting an asteroid heading for Earth in *The Dig*.



Above: Stranded on an alien world, Commander Low and his team consider that malted milk biscuits might not exist here.

refreshingly original and novel in its approach and works well. The overall story is intricate and complex, with some excellent twists and turns. While the graphics are minimalistic, the game still looks incredibly good, with some well-drawn scenes. It's an atypical adventure this one, but *Loom* certainly has a lot of charm and plenty to offer.

### The Dig (DOS)

Finally, we have *The Dig*, a sci-fi game based on a story by Steven Spielberg, originally intended to be made into an

episode of *Amazing Stories*. The budget was too great for a television production; however, Spielberg had been impressed by LucasArts's adaptation of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* into adventure game format. So, after meeting LucasArts, Spielberg's story would eventually become an adventure game; this is how *The Dig* came to be. It begins with a mission to divert an asteroid heading for Earth, led by Commander Boston Low (your character). However, it soon ends up with Low and his team stranded on an alien

planet looking for a way home. The story and atmosphere of *The Dig* are up there with some of the best LucasArts has to offer, with a vivid and captivating alien world to discover. The interaction and development of the main characters are also real highlights of this game. However, some puzzles can be incredibly tough to solve, with some relying on trial and error to figure out alien technology. However, it's worth persevering just to experience this epic story that never quite made it to our screens.







# FUSION

Game : Mega Man X7  
Year : 2003  
System : PlayStation 2  
Words : Ben Magnet



■ Mega Man X7 is horrible in nearly every way. Slow action, terrible 3D level design, and a cardinal sin we will get to shortly. Seriously, go to YouTube, type it in the search bar, and revel in the videos calling it the worst Mega Man game of all time. For many, this game soured the Mega Man X franchise, and the stain is still plain to see to this day.

While the complaints with this game are warranted, there are some nice things we can say about X7. Switching between two different characters on the fly and getting minor upgrades while saving NPCs is a good idea. Sadly, the mix of 2D to 3D level design and no camera controls hurt the game. While in a 3D space, the camera doesn't move with the other joystick, meaning you can't see your surroundings, which leads to many deaths when jumping off a ledge. Characters were also imbalanced to the point where playing as X or newcomer Axl was far easier than playing as Zero. The latter had to get very close to enemies to hit them, which meant that you would often suffer damage because you were so close.

The cardinal sin of X7 is that X isn't playable until over halfway through the game. That's right; you can't play as him until you meet a special requirement. You'll need to rescue sixty-four out of over one hundred NPCs littered throughout the game's eight stages, meaning for a large chunk of the game, you can ONLY play as Zero and Axl. What's worse is that the upgrades you get with Zero and Axl don't transfer over to X, meaning you'll have to replay multiple levels as X to find his armour pods and upgrade him. It's a slog, to say the least.

The Mega Man X franchise has been in Capcom purgatory for a while now. Even though there is Mega Man X8 and Mega Man X: Command Mission, these games weren't enough to clean the stain X7 left behind. Maybe someday we'll see Mega Man X9; all we can do is wait and hope.





**SPECTRUM 48k**

# THE TRANSFORMERS™



**ocean**





## WE ALL KNOW OCEAN SOFTWARE MADE SOME LICENSED GAMES OF QUESTIONABLE QUALITY. BEN HONEBONE GOES ALL THE WAY BACK TO 1985 TO FIND ONE

■ The premise of the first ever *Transformers* game will be familiar to anyone who knows the original cartoon. The warring robots are in the middle of an energy, or rather Energon crisis, and you command a team of Autobots to retrieve the four parts of the Energon cube. Once you find one piece of Energon, you'll need to take it back to your starting point at Autobot base before collecting the next piece.

Naturally, this isn't a simple task because there is a horde of Decepticons gunning for you. You'll need to avoid the Decepticons or destroy them with your blaster while you hunt for Energon. Once you have assembled the Energon cube, it's back to the start to do the whole thing again, again, and...

*Transformers* offers you control of no fewer than five Autobot warriors: Optimus Prime, Mirage, Bumblebee, Hound, and Jazz. Each robot is recognisable, and the transformation animation when you change to vehicle mode is excellent. Your Decepticon foes are also well drawn and instantly recognisable. Seeing Ravage chasing you as you rush by in vehicle mode is a

particular highlight.

Unfortunately, that's all the good stuff out of the way. Once the exhilaration of seeing the Transformers come to life on the Spectrum has waned, you find yourself with a fiddly, often unresponsive game that has drab, empty backgrounds. It's also probably one of the most impractical flick-screen games ever. There is no way to know if a Decepticon will spawn at the edge of the screen when you reach it or what the following screen will bring, resulting in numerous collisions and inevitable frustration.

While zipping along in your vehicle mode is one of the game's better features, perhaps its biggest offence is the flying mode. Yes, you read that right. Autobots couldn't fly in the cartoon (unless they transformed into a flying thing, obviously). In this game, they can, and you must fly to find the Energon. It's challenging to say the least, especially when faced with narrow corridors of lethal scenery and the unpredictability of the flick-screen. Touching any solid scenery or simply touching the ground in flying mode will result in death.

I only got to play this game at friends' houses because it was never released for the Amstrad CPC. Getting my friends to load it up on their Spectrums for me would always take some convincing because, as it turned out, it was a bit rubbish.





# RetCon

## 2022

### THE RETRO GAMING FESTIVAL

Words by Retro Faith



Above Left: RetCon gets off to a good start. Above Right: Philip Oliver checking out the *Dizzy* games and merchandise.

**THE 2022 CONVENTION SEASON IS WELL UNDERWAY, WITH EVENTS COMING THICK AND FAST. JUNE 18TH SAW THE FUSION TEAM OF CHRIS, ALAN, AND FAITH MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE GREENFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE IN NORTH LONDON FOR RETCON**

■ This year's event was the biggest iteration of the grassroots Retro extravaganza yet. Attendees came from far and wide to get their retro fix, which has expanded to multiple floors for the first time. The event is the brainchild of Steven Bennett, who also runs the Greenford Computer Club.

Steven tells me he didn't realise people would travel such distances to attend. "I didn't realise the reach we had. People came all the way from Leeds and Sheffield. It all went smooth; people loved the different rooms." Club member Martin Evans explains that at the event, "you get to see all these wild and wonderful old systems that you have no idea about. And also the things that are going on with these consoles now, the mods people are making, the games, the homebrew scene. The community can get together and see it all in one place."

RetCon aims to provide Retro fanatics with a barrage of old consoles and computers to play on. Everything from a standard NES with *Duck Hunt* to rare Netlink Saturn set-ups for *Daytona USA* were available. Other systems included an

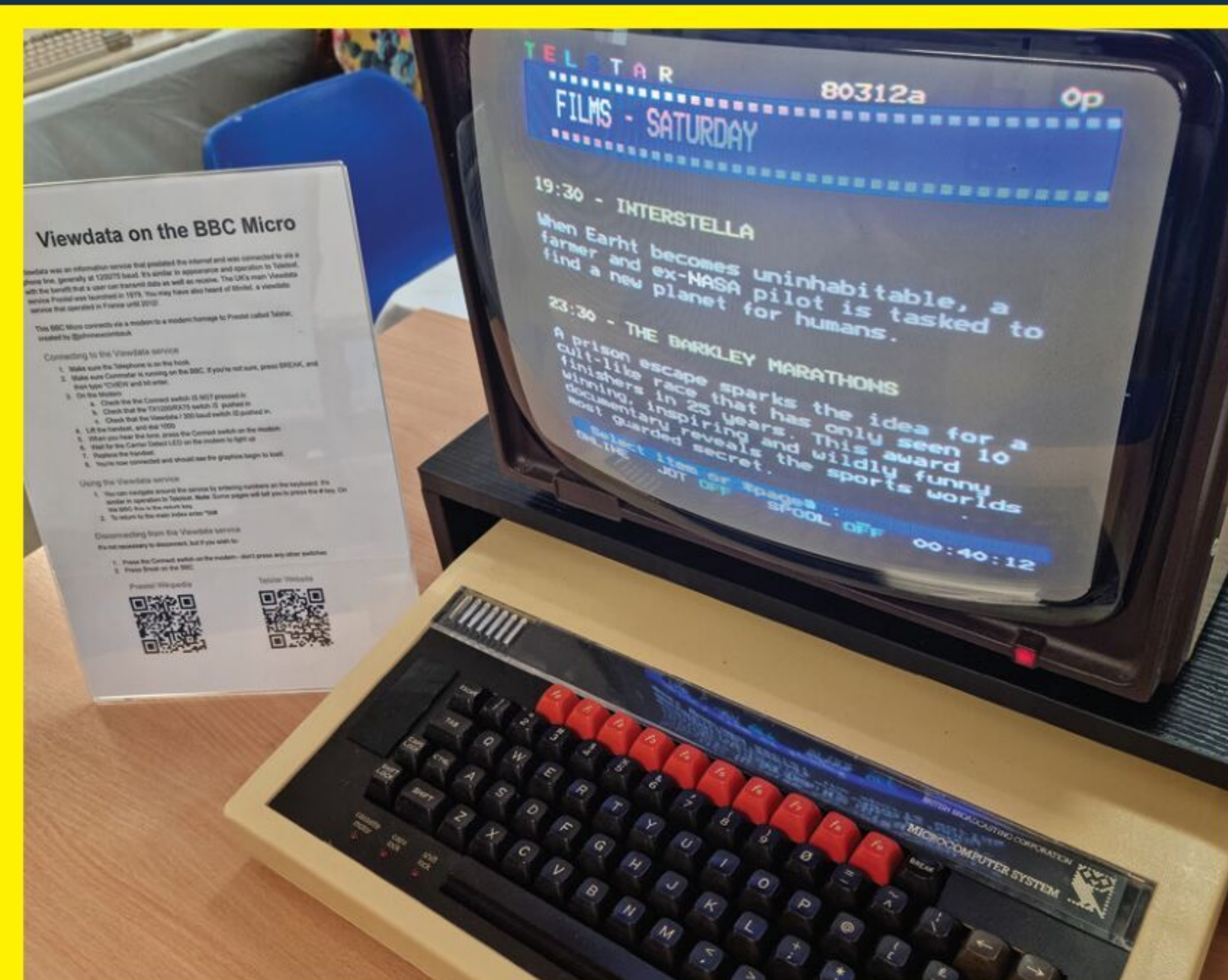


Atari Jaguar CD and a NeoGeo MVS mixed in with MegaDrives and Spectrums. Most of the attractions were busy throughout the day, and it was great to see so many different computers and consoles to try out. The Greenford Computer Club did an outstanding job on the day, showing people how to play each system, and the attention to detail was noticeable.

As with any retro convention, popular industry figures' talks are a big draw. For RetCon '22, The Oliver Twins were the headline act. Only Philip from the legendary team made the event on the day, but Andrew was there in spirit. Philip took us on a journey from bedroom coding to

That's why we come to these events, and that's why they'll keep going."

Another dynamic duo of guests was Anthony and Nicola Caulfield. They discussed their latest documentary celebrating forty years of the Spectrum. They loved being guests, and Anthony said, "we had such a wonderful time here last year. This event is from the oldest computer club in the UK, it was lovely to just chat, and we had a lot of questions. This is where the grassroots keep the scene going." Nicola agreed and explained that "it's lovely, we've played everything from really early stuffy right through to some modern stuff."



Above Left: Back to school with the very British BBC Micro.



Above Right: Anthony & Nicola Caulfield with their daughter.

running a global development studio. It's a story many will be familiar with, but hearing the stories told in front of you is special. Another interesting talk was with David Pleasance, of Commodore fame, explaining his plans to create a global Commodore alliance.

Steven Fletcher, director of The Commodore Story, spoke to the crowd about his upcoming film, Amiga: Alive and Kicking. When asked about speaking at events like RetCon, he explained that "events like RetCon allow people to meet and share their experiences. It helps people's mental state by giving them a space out of their houses. It's good to communicate about our hobby." Steven went on to say, "considering lockdown, it's so good to see people come together to shake hands; it's the best thing."

The Caulfields also expressed excitement about showing their nine-year-old daughter older consoles like the PS1, and the drive to get families at the event so younger generations can experience Retro games. Few would argue that the family atmosphere is one of RetCon's defining features and a big draw. Steven Bennett sums up this ethos well by explaining, "It's a fun day out for all the family, everyone is welcome, and we want to give the best experience. There was a father and son with RetCon t-shirts on, I was surprised, but it makes me feel like I am doing something right."

RetCon's timetable is all backed up by two gaming tournaments that go on throughout the day. The first was a high-score leaderboard for Steven Fletcher's *Cosmic Force* C64 game.





**Top Left:** Steven Fletcher speaking about his upcoming documentary *Amiga: Alive & Kicking*. **Top Right:** RetCon in full swing. **Centre (from left to right):** The Atari Jaguar, more SAM Coupés than Alan and Chris could handle [we're both ok now - Ed], a NeoGeo MVS. **Bottom (from left to right):** Phillip Oliver, Martin Evans, Steven Fletcher, and David Pleasance.

The other tournament was a *Sensible Soccer* competition. A guest area in the main room, where fans could meet some Retro celebs, was also busy throughout the day. Most attendees wanted a selfie with Philip Oliver – well, that's to be expected. A raffle draw took place to round off festivities, with lots of fantastic prizes up for grabs, the highlight being an Evercade with some games.

Overall, RetCon '22 had everything a Retro fan could need on a day out. Everything was on offer, from the abundance of retro hardware to the Retro celebs telling their stories. The atmosphere felt electric, and that grassroots feel, which is so crucial to the team, was strong.

FUSION passes huge congratulations to Greenford Computer Club, the backbone of RetCon. They were out in full force to provide an excellent experience spread across four rooms. RetCon is an important event in the Retro calendars that keeps getting better and better.

I will leave the final words to club member Chris Neatby-Smith "RetCon is about nostalgia. It harkens back to a time when small groups would go around each other houses to play games and do computer stuff. But nowadays, everything is online, and days like today are about keeping it small, keeping it intimate. We can talk to each other face to face and share these ideas and passions."



AWARD-WINNING SOFTWARE FOR THE COMMODORE 64/128

# PSYTRONIK

S O F T W A R E

[www.psytronik.net](http://www.psytronik.net)



THE NEW OFFICIAL PSYTRONIK SOFTWARE  
SECURE ONLINE STORE IS NOW OPEN!

[www.psytronik.store](http://www.psytronik.store)



The background of the entire page is a pixelated screenshot from the game 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge'. It shows a city street at night with a brick building in the background. In the foreground, a green turtle (Leonardo) is on the left, and a red and orange character (Shredder) is on the right. The title 'TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES' is in a green, bubbly font at the top, and 'SHREDDER'S REVENGE' is in a large, white, stylized font with purple outlines in the center.

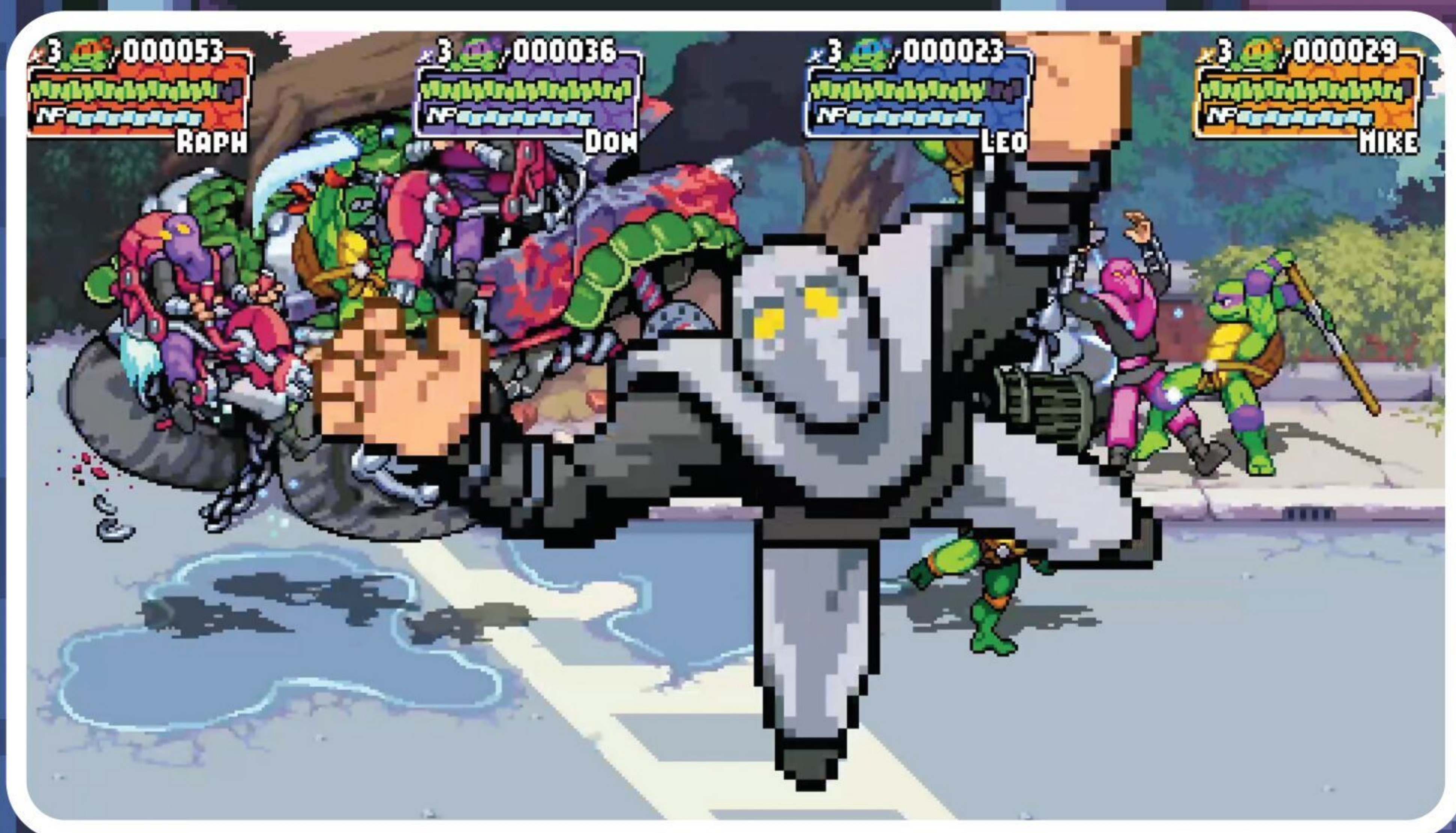
# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES SHREDDER'S REVENGE

## RETRO FAITH FINDS OUT IF THE GAME LIVES UP TO THE HYPE

■ Scrolling beat 'em-ups are back in fashion, and everyone has had their eye on publisher DotEmu's *TMNT: Shredder's Revenge*. Its release came out of the blue, with the company announcing that it would land suddenly on the 16th of June. Preview videos and interviews with developer Tribute pointed to the game being ready, so the quick drop release was not all that surprising. We can confidently say that *Shredder's Revenge* was much anticipated by fans of the original *TMNT* series and by beat 'em-up fans around the world.

The headline is that it doesn't disappoint. Everything has been well thought out with care and attention. The excellent combat mechanics are combined with beautiful Retro pixel art that pays homage to all those classic *TMNT* games of the 90s. Fans of the comics, cartoons and films will have much to pore over, and those looking for a quality scrolling brawler will have a blast. This result, however, was to be expected; DotEmu found fame and





success with the excellent *Streets of Rage IV* released last year, and the follow-up had to live up to it.

As with all good beat 'em-ups, we need a bad guy with an evil plan for our heroes to hunt down and stop. It would've been rude not to use Shredder, the series' infamous villain, as the big bad boss. He has decided he wants to rebuild Krang, another of the series' nasties, and has sent his henchmen to find bits of his body. As expected, the story has no real bearing on the gameplay, and it's there to tie together the different levels and provide a grandstand finish. However, anyone with fond memories of the Turtles will notice the little details and nods during the simple cutscenes.

Once you get into the game, it is immediately apparent that DotEmu and Tribute wanted to create a classic arcade experience that oozes Retro. But, they also focused on modern gaming with quality of life features and a gradual difficulty curve. Anyone who puts any time into *Shredder's Revenge* should be able to complete the main game in an hour or two. The difficulty is probably the one aspect that hardcore arcade gamers will point to as being disappointing. It's hard to actually see a "Game Over" screen, or even die





especially on the easier difficulty settings.

That said, there are plenty of in-game achievements and unlockables to hunt down, so it's not all plain sailing. There is also a level-up system to contend with, so you must complete the main game with every playable character to see everything the game has to offer. It is not just a box-checking exercise either. Some upgrades acquired via the level-ups give extra moves, health, and abilities. This progression provides some longevity to an otherwise straightforward game, and will keep you coming back to try other characters.

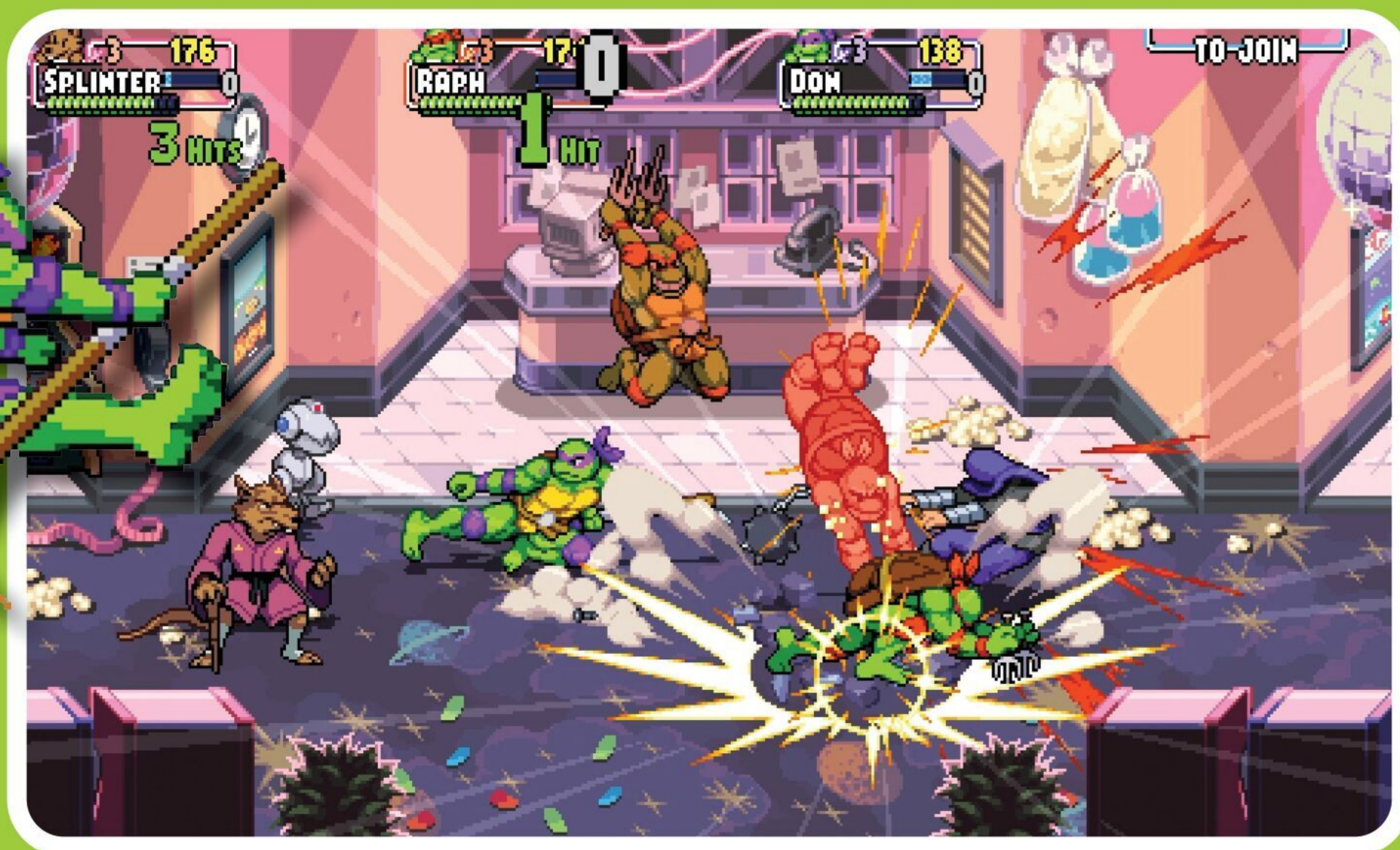
The combat in *Shredder's Revenge* has been well implemented and caters to genre newbies and seasoned brawler veterans. There's a great balance between simple 90s button-bashing goodness and modern techniques that encourages practice. Those who just want a quick blast can crack on without learning the nuances of the combat system. But those who enjoy learning advanced techniques and racking up massive combos will find some depth here. This depth is important, given the type of game it is versus the fans of the Turtles who would also be playing.

Graphically, *Shredder's Revenge* looks like a hyped-up version of the original Konami *TMNT* game released in arcades in 1989. It has similar life bars and information about your character displayed at the top. The animations are excellent, and the level of detail in recreating the Turtles' world is remarkable. The music from Lee Tope, who crafted a pulsating retro score, perfectly compliments the action. Throughout *Shredder's Revenge*, the overall presentation is high quality and will please the Retro fans after



Above: The game's animated intro is a real treat for fans.





many derided the cel-shaded look of the hand-drawn *Streets of Rage IV*.

*Shredder's Revenge* has been developed with multiplayer at its core, and this is the best way to enjoy the game as playing solo is a little flat at times. Online or couch play is available, with both providing high-octane thrills. You can have up to six players at once; anyone who remembers the four-player antics of the *TMNT* arcade will enjoy the chaos caused by this many fighters on-screen. There have been reports of some glitches on several different platforms, most notably Xbox, but DotEmu should sort

these with a patch soon.

From the fantastic opening animated intro to the little cameos and Easter eggs, *Shredder's Revenge* is a wonderful brawler that ticks all the boxes. It may lack the difficulty of a true arcade game, but there's enough in the combat and levelling systems to grab the attention of hardcore players. It also has everything you need for an entertaining blast for casual fans looking for a bit of fun. Anyone who enjoys the genre should be picking this one up; it's a refreshing title that makes excellent use of a much loved franchise that remains popular today. COWABUNGA!



# FUSION



Game : Lemmings

Year : 1991

System : Amiga ( And countless others)

Words : Retro Faith

What could be better than watching some little yellow pixelated rodent explode in front of you? Maybe watching some little yellow pixelated rodent explode after you, acting as a god, made them do it. This is the world of *Lemmings*, the 1991 strategy puzzle game from DMA Design.

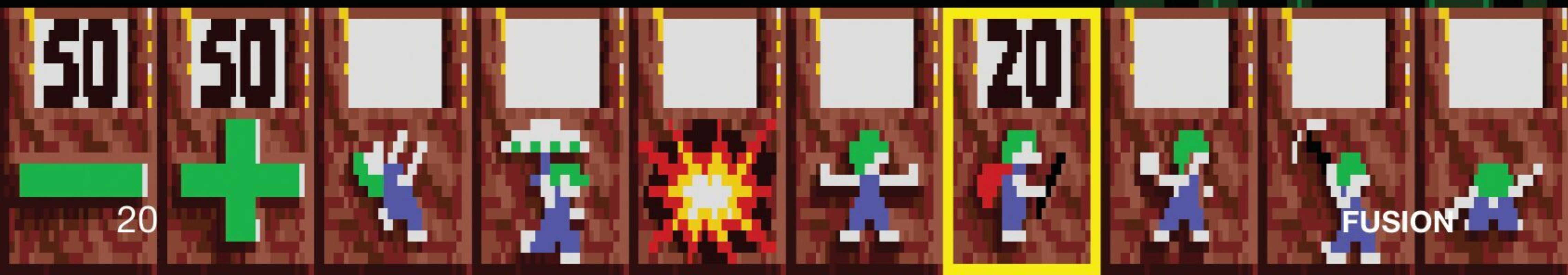
There had been other games centred around puzzles and anthropomorphic characters, but those little *Lemmings* took things to a new level. The famous Scottish studio turned the tables with its original art style and genuinely new gameplay.

Upon its release, puzzle games were suddenly cool, and everyone wanted to have a go. There was something magical about controlling a gang of dumb critters that kept walking in the same direction until you ordered them to do something different. It wasn't just the charming graphics or funny sounds that grabbed the attention, although hearing one shout "OH NO!" just before they explode is hilarious. The ingenious level design and tough difficulty curve provided a real depth that complemented the outlandish presentation.

The original Amiga game was ported to almost every platform imaginable and spawned a series of sequels that were just as highly regarded. Many will point to *Lemmings* as the turning point in the puzzle genre by blending frantic action with deliciously designed traps for the absentminded *Lemmings*. It's still an absolute joy to play through today and often finds itself high on many gamers' lists of the greatest games of all time. *Lemmings* truly is a classic in every sense of the word.



# OUT 27









# TOYS THAT BECAME MOVIE PROPS

## TOY POLLOI GOES TO THE MOVIES TO FIND CLASSIC TOYS ON THE SILVER SCREEN

■ In the past, to keep costs down in movie and TV production, special FX model makers would take an existing toy and modify it rather than creating a model from scratch. You are unlikely to have noticed them, but once you know they are there, you will start seeing more of them.

In films, you'll often see toys used as props in children's bedrooms. Those are pretty easy to spot, like all the Star Wars figures in Steven Spielberg's *ET* or the *Poltergeist* movies. Many model makers use parts from model kits to embellish spaceships or buildings, including in Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* and most of the ships in the *Star Wars* films. The ones I will discuss below all use off-the-shelf toys as part of the special FX process.

### Moonraker (1979)

With the success of *Star Wars*, James Bond's eleventh outing turned to the space-themed *Moonraker*. James Bond travels to space to stop Drax's plans to kill the world's population and





replace them with genetically perfect humans to create a new master race. A typical Bond adventure.

The movie required a massive battle sequence in space with astronauts fighting in a laser battle around Drax's space station. Created by Derek Meddings, the special FX scenes were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects. But, you may not have realised that Palitoy's Action Man had a pivotal role in this space battle.

For the basis of the twelve-inch astronaut special FX model, Meddings used a blue pants era Action Man. Behind-the-scenes shots of the production clearly show Action Man's face and original hands painted silver inside a rather impressive-looking handmade spacesuit. The details and quality of this prop make the Space Ranger toy versions we got from Palitoy look relatively simple. One day I may try to make something like this for one of my Action Men to wear.



**Above:** We have the technology to make a better, stronger, faster Jedi (What?! - Ed). Steve Austin on the right in the Land Speeder. **Left:** Action Man taking the real-life risks as Roger Moore's stunt double in Moonraker. Photos courtesy of 'Adam Savage's Tested' YouTube channel.

## Star Wars (1977)

In a previous article (Fusion Annual 2022), I discussed how toy makers Kenner re-used some Six Million Dollar Man toys for the Star Wars franchise by changing a few colours and adding new stickers. As well as this, Steve Austin makes an appearance in the movie; not the actor Lee Majors, but the Kenner Six Million Dollar Man doll. The model makers at ILM used the doll as a basis for Obi-Wan Kenobi in Luke's Land speeder as it arrives at the Mos Eisley Spaceport. It is difficult to see this in the film, but behind-the-scenes shots of the models clearly show Steve Austin and his Bionic eye hiding under a Jedi robe.





**Above:** George Lucas playing with his toys.

**Below:** Two Action Man figures inside the Jabba the Hutt mould. Photo courtesy of 'Life Inside Jabba the Hutt'.

## Return of the Jedi (1983)

Unsurprisingly, by the time Return of the Jedi was released, the special FX teams at ILM had started using many of the Star Wars-related toys and models to help get ever more impressive shots completed. Often they used the Star Wars model kits, but in one instance, they used Kenner's die-cast Tie Fighter. We know this because there are photos of George Lucas visiting the ILM workshops at the time. On the table in front of him, you can clearly see rows of the Kenner die-cast Tie Fighter. It's distinctive because the wings are not quite the correct shape and on the back of the body is an oblong block that Kenner had added to the larger toy version of the Tie Fighter to store the batteries, which they then copied onto the smaller die-cast version.

Spotting these toys in the final movie takes a keen eye, but you can see them in the background during the battle above Endor.

**Watch it:** <https://bit.ly/3nbGqlv>

I recently learned that Palitoy's Action Man was used in making Return of the Jedi; he helped in the design of Jabba the Hutt. In Jamie Benning's excellent documentary 'Life Inside Jabba the Hutt,' we get a glimpse of how the mechanics of Jabba the Hutt worked. It involved two blue





pants-era Action Man figures, and I wonder if these two figures are still stored somewhere in the Lucasfilm archives?

**Watch it:** <https://bit.ly/39H7ndw>

### Terrahawks (1983)

In my opinion, Gerry Anderson's Terrahawks has some of the best-designed Spaceships from any of his series. The iconic silver and orange paint schemes on their unique shapes make them an eye-catching set of vehicles. Bandai produced a range of toys based on these ships, which are some of the most accurate toys of the time (as reviewed in FUSION #8). So it's hardly surprising that the production team used one of the Hawkwing toys in a few episodes, including 'Ten Top Pop.' It was modified with a more detailed paint scheme and added lights, and the team crashed it into a building at the end of the episode. I guess it's cheaper to destroy a toy than the original Hawkwing prop.

The modified Hawkwing toy was recently sold at auction for a staggering £750. I bid on it,

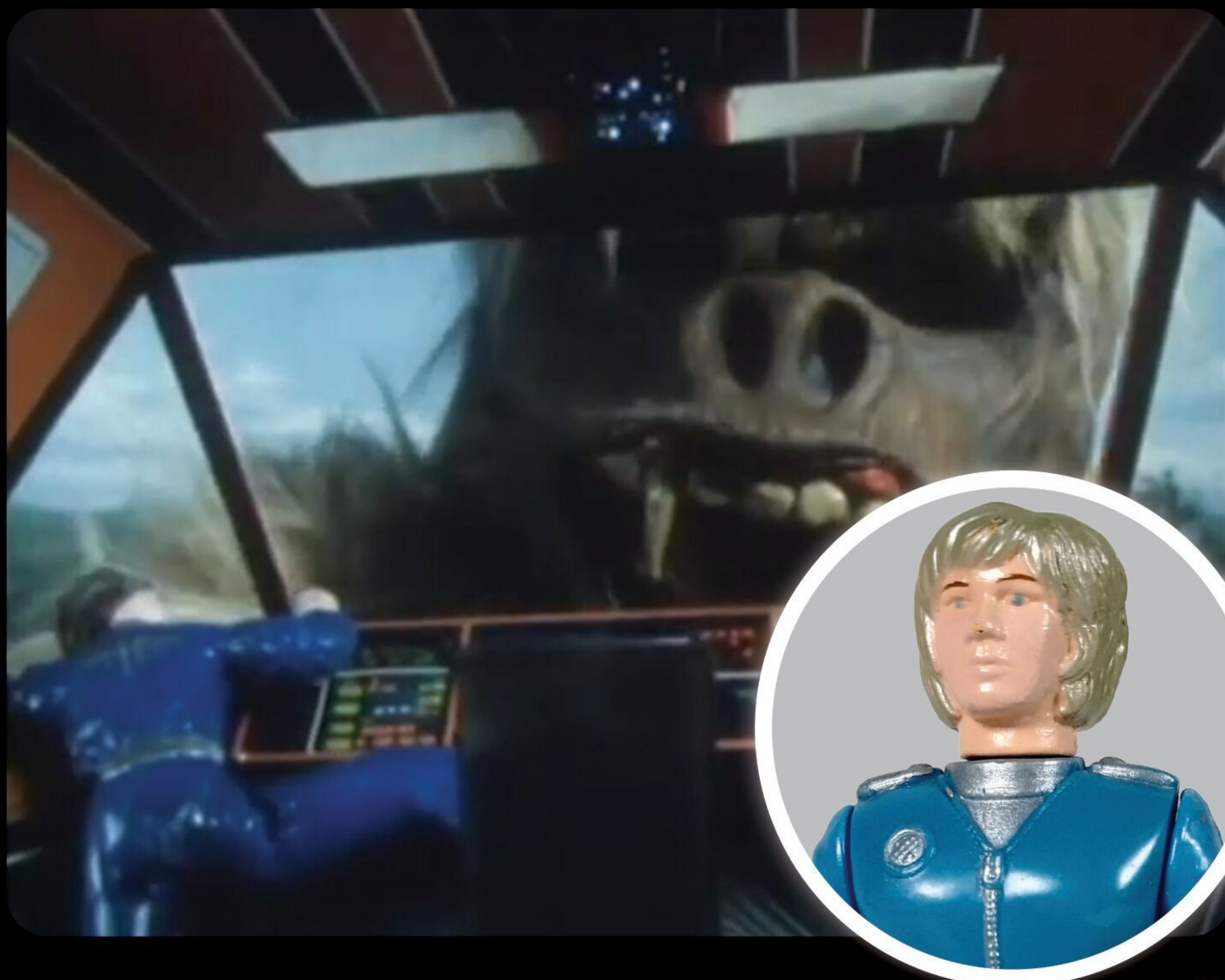


**Above:** The Terrahawks Hawkwing toy. **Below:** The Space Giant attacking the Ground Hawk with the Mary Falconer toy inside.

but that was way more than I could afford!

In the episode 'Space Giant', you also get to see a modified version of the Mary Falconer action figure inside the cockpit of the Ground Hawk while the space giant is attacking it. It looks crudely modified and re-painted, but it did the job and saved a lot of work for someone.

**Watch it:** <https://bit.ly/3xRMEvU>







**Above:** Han Solo discovers the Matrix of Leadership on the Klingon homeworld (You're fired! - Ed). **Right:** The wonderfully gruesome looking 'SketTek' with an eye on the dark side.

## Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)

Many people know there are links between Raiders of the Lost Ark and Star Wars, with the main ones being R2-D2 and C-3PO appearing in the hieroglyphics in the 'Well of Souls.' But you may not know that ILM used Kenner's Star Wars figures in the final scene where the Ark of the covenant is opened. Recent auctions from the Prop Store revealed a re-painted Bespin Luke Skywalker figure made to look like a German soldier.

For any customisers out there, this would be an easy figure to make as it looks like the details have been added using masking tape and paper.

## The Dark Crystal (1982)

Another film that uses a Star Wars toy is Jim Henson's The Dark Crystal. Set a thousand years ago on the planet Thra, two new races appear when a piece of the Crystal of Truth is shattered; the cruel Skeksis, who use continued corruption of the Crystal to extend their lives, and the gentle urRu.

For the Skeksis, Jim Henson had the seven deadly sins in mind. He wanted them to look part reptile, part predatory bird, and part dragon with a penetrating stare. If you look very closely at the Skeksis 'SketTek', you may notice something from a galaxy far, far away. The midsection from



a Kenner Diecast Tie Fighter covers his right eye. It's not the most obvious of toys, but eagle-eyed fans have spotted it over the years.

I'm sure there are many more instances where toys were used as cheap sources of parts for special FX shots. If you know of any, drop me a line as I would love to hear about them.

**toy-polloi**



[www.youtube.com/toypolloi](http://www.youtube.com/toypolloi)  
[@toy\\_polloi](https://twitter.com/toy_polloi)  
[www.facebook.com/ToyPolloi](https://www.facebook.com/ToyPolloi)  
[@toypolloi](https://www.instagram.com/toypolloi)  
[www.toypolloi.com](http://www.toypolloi.com)



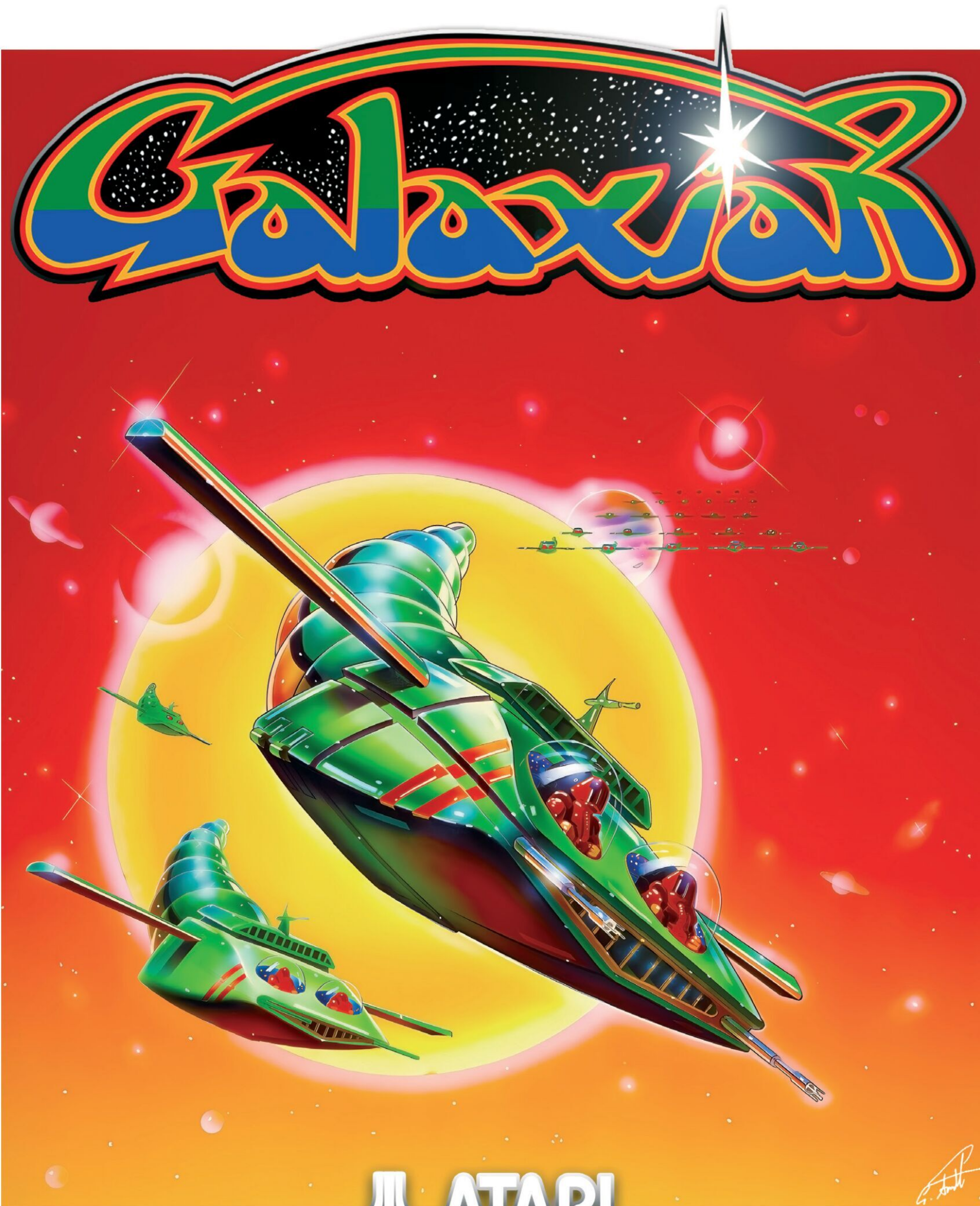


Image courtesy of @GARYARNOTT Follow him on Twitter to see more of his tributes to classic game covers.



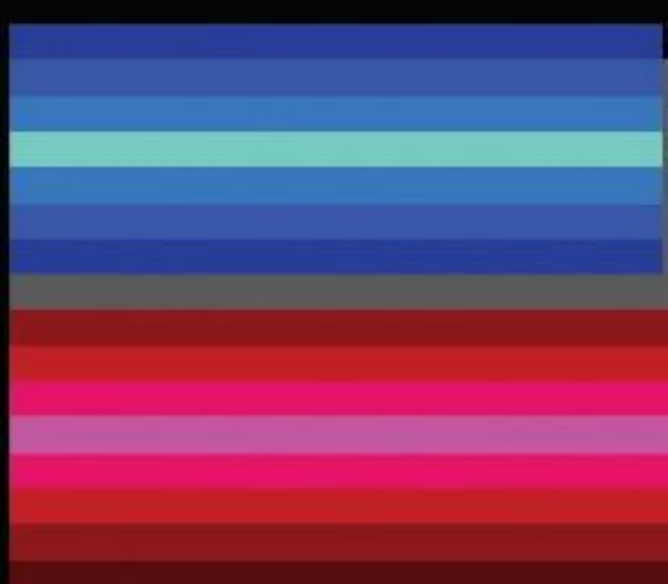
*THAT MOMENT WHEN...*

SENY Television Dr. E.  
NEO Stereo Video



Sale

POWER  
ENEMY







**YOU MEET ED-209**

**ROBOCOP**





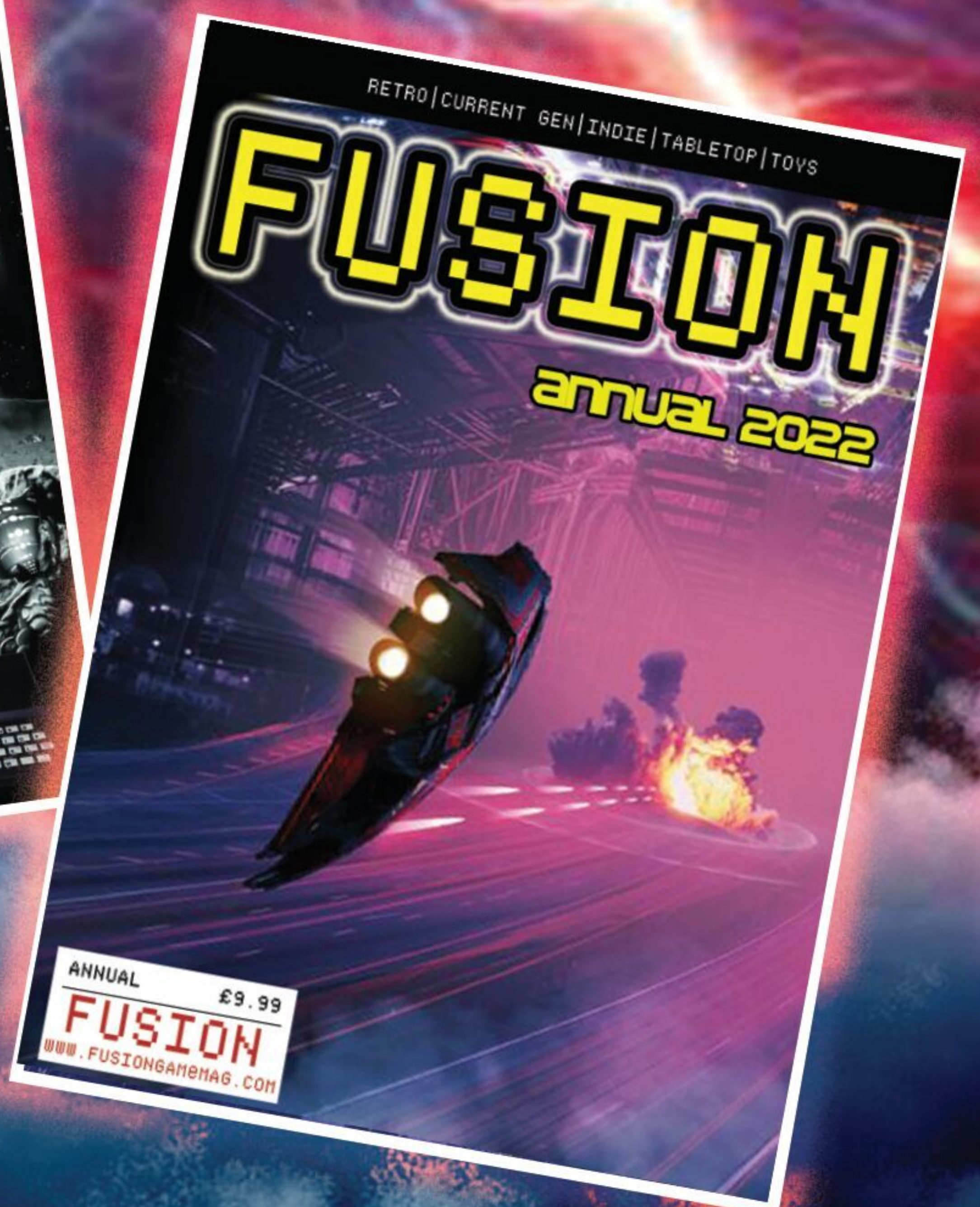
**Subscribe to ensure  
you don't miss an  
issue!**

**Purchase current and back issues at:  
[www.fusiongamemag.com](http://www.fusiongamemag.com)**



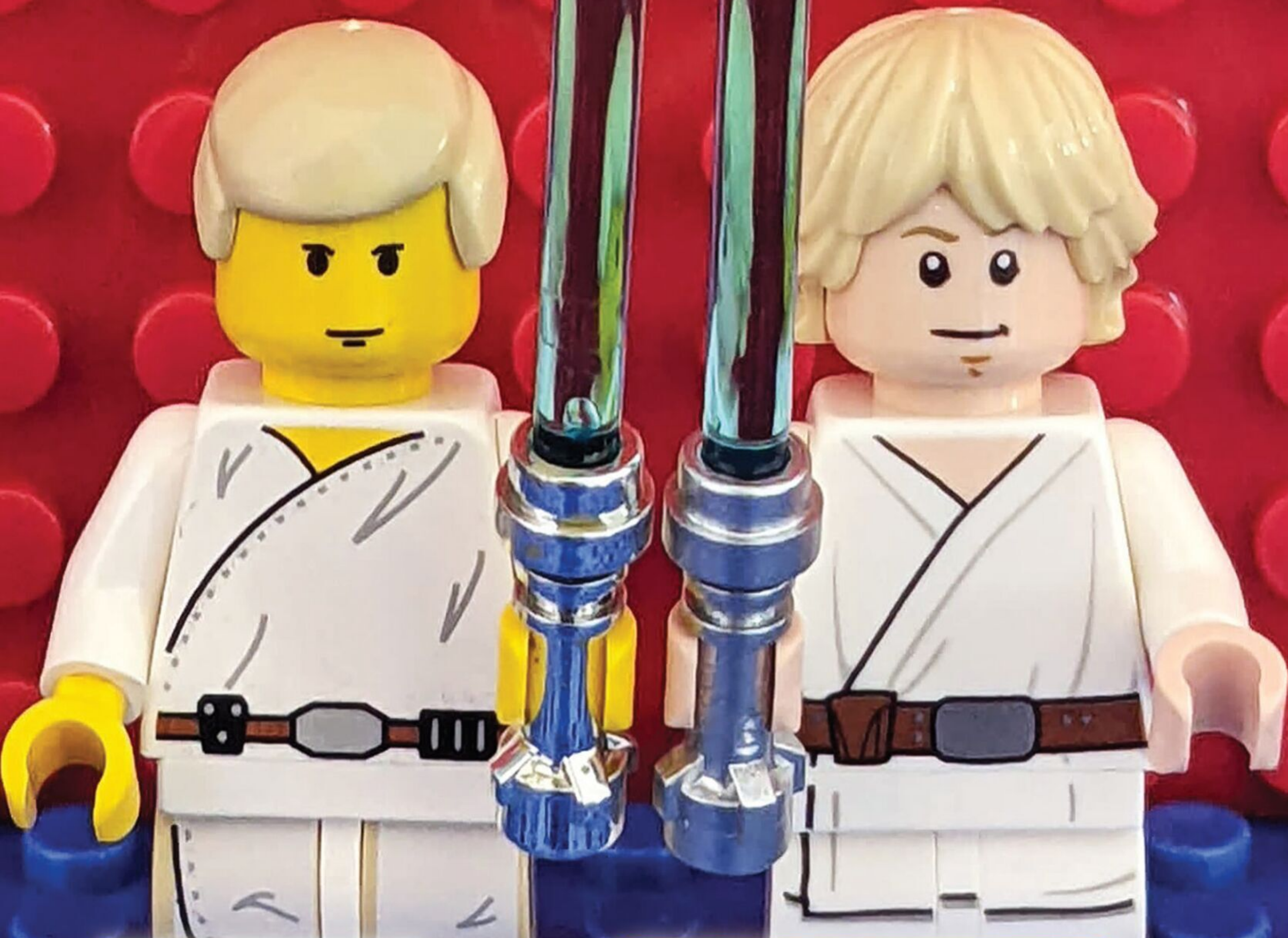
**Publishing retro-gaming  
books and magazines  
since 2006**

# FUSION





RYAN COLEMAN  
EXPLAINS HOW  
HE SPENT ALL HIS  
POCKET MONEY  
ON STAR WARS  
LEGO AND SHARES  
SOME PHOTOS OF  
HIS COLLECTION





■ It was April 1999, and I was nine years old, sitting in the back of my parent's camper van and flicking through the newest weekly Beano comic. I had just opened the cover to get my weekly fix of Dennis and Gnasher's hijinks when a wondrous sight beheld my eyes, stirring a crazed excitement that usually only manifested at Christmas or birthdays.

What was the cause of my elation? Quite simply, an advertisement. There, in the centre of the comic, stood evil Galactic-overlord Darth Vader, arms outstretched with "the force" swirling around his hands, with a TIE fighter in one and another Imperial-looking vehicle in the other. The marvellous thing to me was that all these vehicles were made of Lego.

In my life, there have only been a handful

of moments where a garbled shriek was one of the few noises I could utter, but this was one of those times. I swiftly tried to convey to my parents just how essential owning a Star Wars Lego toy would be to my continued existence.

Before this new discovery, I'd attempted to make my own Star Wars Lego models, but even with the wonder of a child's imagination, my space-fantasy immersion was marred - mainly by the fact that my version of Luke Skywalker was a black-haired Minifigure wearing a painter's overalls and clutching an aerial for a lightsaber.

The following weekend, we drove to Martin's Models in Leominster. I had already decided I would be leaving with a Lego Land-speeder, as it was the most affordable set. It came with Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, two very "essential" characters. To my amazement, knowing just how excited I was for this new line, my parents offered me







Above: The advert that started it all for Ryan in 1999.

sets. Despite my ridiculously high expectations, those Lego sets were everything I had dreamed of.

For the best part of a decade, Star Wars hadn't been a property that had seen much in the way of merchandise. The early 90s saw a release of some rubber "bend 'ems" toys, and then in 1995 came Kenner's infamous 'Power of the Force' toyline. This was a series of laughably muscular action figures intended to compete with the ripped superhero and


a deal. If I bought the Landspeeder, they'd also buy me the more expensive X-wing Fighter set, on the condition I tidied my room when we got home. I would often agree to clean my room, but rarely would I deliver though there usually wasn't usually a Lego X-wing Fighter at stake.

By the time I finished tidying that evening, it was far too late to begin constructing my new models. So I lay in bed, trying to doze off while staring at the Lego boxes on my table.

I woke absurdly early and spent a happy couple of hours building my new

wrestling characters on the shelves at the time. But, classic building toys like Lego that encouraged imagination, crossing over with the excitement and adventure of Star Wars was a marriage made in heaven. The photos on the earlier set boxes suggested some exciting alternative builds, which were always a little crazy and not particularly Star Wars-like, but this encouragement to use my imagination appealed to me. Just because I had Luke Skywalker and R2D2 Minifigures, it didn't mean they had to pilot the X-wing. Who knows what crazy spaceships Luke flew while





A few weeks later, a wave of Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace sets appeared on store shelves. Many who grew up with the original Star Wars trilogy aren't shy about expressing disdain for Episode I. Still, for an excited nine-year-old, the Lego sets fed my hype about the movie. I was enthralled when I picked out the Naboo swamp set, which came with some strange skeletal-looking beige robots, and a character called Qui-Gon Jinn (which I had decided was some misprint as the character in my mind was a pre-Vader Anakin Skywalker). There was also a cool-looking alien called Jar-Jar Binks, who was clearly going to be one of the new and best-loved characters in the movie (Oh, the power of hindsight).

Since then, Star Wars Lego has never gone away, and neither has my fondness for it. Sometimes years can pass by without my picking up a new set, but it is still something I've found myself returning to repeatedly, whether picking up a few of the Clone Wars sets when that series aired on television

his X-wing was under repair after he'd blown up the first Death Star!

Along with the endearingly bizarre alternative builds on the boxes, the X-wing set instructions also showed how to make a Lego lightsaber hilt to hold in your hand, and a Lego Snowspeeder build. The latter was incredibly impressive, as Lego was already selling Snowspeeder sets in stores. Yet, they were also showing how to make a similar one with pieces from the X-wing, which is something I couldn't imagine them doing today.





All Lego Photos by Ryan Coleman.

or some of the sets based on Star Wars video games like *The Force Unleashed* or *Knights of the Old Republic*. The latter is one of my favourite pieces of Star Wars media outside of the original three movies. More recently, I bought sets based on the Mandalorian, as owning a teeny little Grogu (AKA Baby Yoda) was something I deemed essential.

Twenty years have passed since my first Star Wars Lego sets, and I have a hard time wrapping my head around this fact. I think that because Lego doesn't change, it feels like less time has passed. That's not to say there haven't been significant changes since the early days of Star Wars Lego as, obviously, there have been a few. One of the most notable changes is the classic yellow Minifigure skin tones being replaced with more realistic flesh colours in the mid-2000s. Sets are also much more technically impressive these days; they are less "blocky," with many newly designed parts produced to make the vehicles and locations look much more faithful to how they appear onscreen.

There is a definite timeless charm to Lego. As soon as I open up a new instruction booklet

or put my first couple of bricks together, swifter than the Millennium Falcon entering lightspeed, I'm transported back to being a kid again, building a Landspeeder and an X-wing in those early morning hours.

The reality is I am getting older, grumpier, and more cynical. Much like the magic of those original three movies, Star Wars Lego never fails to help me forget this, if only for a time, or at least until I get up from building on the floor because my back/knees are aching!

I'm sure many would agree that it will be very sad if Lucasfilm/Disney and Lego decide not to continue their licensing deals one day. However, this seems unlikely, with the Lego company seeing record-breaking profits in 2021. Although I rarely revel in the success of companies already worth billions, there aren't many toys like Star Wars Lego that have been a mainstay for over two decades. With the world feeling less familiar than ever and once-loved stores like Woolworths or Toys R Us now being all but a distant memory, seeing something from my childhood still going strong is undeniably gratifying.





# A GIANT EVENT

**IS COMING...  
NOVEMBER  
2022**

IN COLLABORATION  
WITH



[www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk](http://www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk)





# FUSION

## MUSICAL MARVELS

### BEN HONEBONE AVOIDS TEMPLARS AND CLIMBS TO THE TOP OF THE COLISSEUM TO BRING FUSION A MUSICAL MARVEL FROM ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD

■ *Assassin's Creed* has come a long way since the first game in the series debuted in 2007. Beginning life as a prototype *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* sequel, *Assassin's Creed* has grown to become the sprawling franchise that we know today. Danish composer Jesper Kyd created the soundtracks for the first four mainline games in the series and played a vital role in establishing the historical tone and atmosphere of the *Assassin's Creed* games.

The third game in the series, *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, is set in Rome in the early 1500s and features lush open spaces separating each city. When traversing these lands (without incident), the sound of 'Rome Countryside' accompanies you. Haunting and soothing in equal measure, the piece complements the open fields and ancient structures that pepper Rome's countryside. No moment in *Brotherhood* exemplifies this audio-visual combination better than when you approach the Coliseum on a bright sunny day to the emotive sounds of Jesper Kyd's string arrangement.

### SOUND DESIGN

'Rome Countryside' is a departure from many other pieces featured in *Brotherhood*. It is sweeping and emotional while being instrumentally very sparse. Beginning with familiar, brooding chords from the keyboard, a mainstay of Kyd's work on *Assassin's Creed*, we are introduced to a beautiful soprano. Drenched in lush reverb and full of emotion, the vocal plays wonderfully against the changing chords.

Midway through the piece, the mood and focus shift from the ethereal soprano to a sombre string arrangement that evokes memories of Howard Shore's 'The Riders of Rohan' from *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy.





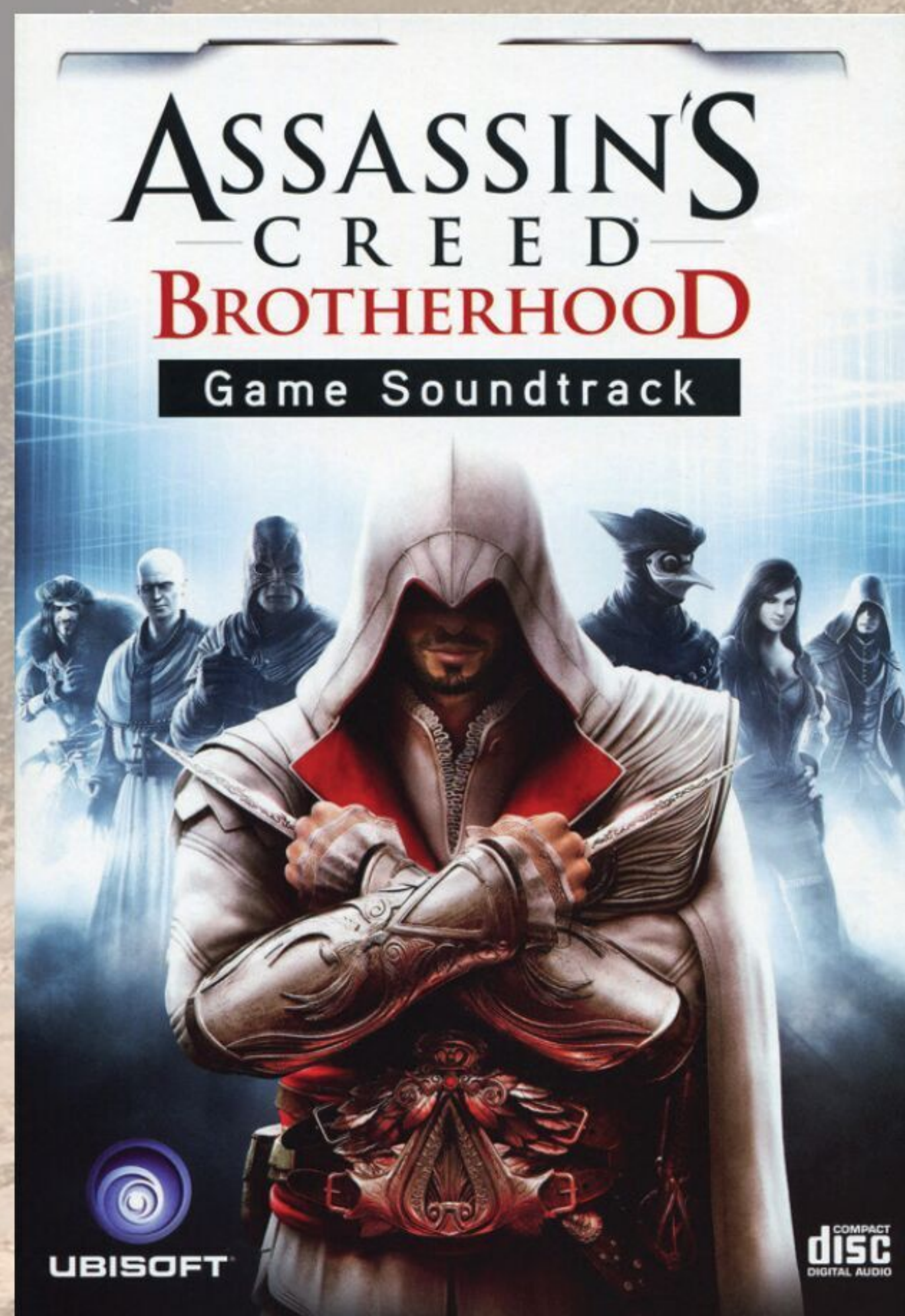
**Musical Marvel:** Rome Countryside  
**Game:** Assassin's Creed Brotherhood  
**System:** Xbox 360, PS3, PC  
**Composer:** Jesper Kyd  
**Release Year:** 2010  
**Soundtrack Link:**  
<https://youtu.be/A5Duv8OWu7s>

Backed by the keyboard and a harmonising orchestral vocal, the melody stimulates emotion. It creates an intense cinematic feeling as you travel around Rome:

## CONCLUSION



Jesper Kyd's work on the *Assassin's Creed* series is extensive and full of stirring, evocative highlights. With its delicate use of chords and themes, 'Rome Countryside' evokes emotion in the player and gives credence to the game's historical context. The melancholy of the soprano and strings is a lament to a time and place hundreds of years in the past. All these factors in concert make 'Rome Countryside' a bonafide Musical Marvel.





# I CAN'T BUY THE GAME I WANT TO BUY

WORDS BY SPARKY

■ **The PS5 is a wonderful beast. I don't have one yet, but I want one. I'll probably bite when a slimline model that fits inside my TV cabinet hits the market within a year or two. Until then, I have my original PS4 and a large, mostly shrink-wrapped, pile of shame that goads me daily.**

But some games that I want to play don't languish in that pile. Oh no, there are some games I simply will not allow to gather dust. I received *It Takes Two* and *Life is Strange: True Colours* for Christmas. I completed both before I even returned to work in the New Year.

I have a particular fondness for horror games; not the supernatural fluff, your regular vampires and zombies, but stuff that is more grounded, more real. Sure, there can be elements of unrealism, but if the characters are well developed, and the story is interesting, I don't notice it as much.

I think this is why I enjoyed *Until Dawn* so much at launch on my PS4. Yes, it was a little clunky, and many of the usual film tropes were present, but the characters were well developed. Voice acting was fantastic, and the character models were incredibly realistic. Rami Malek looked like Rami Malek. Hayden Panettiere

looked like the cheerleader that the world needed to save. This is why I'm so hyped for the spiritual sequel, *The Quarry*, that's due for release this June. An incredible line-up of actors is present; from the gameplay footage we've seen, the script seems more natural than ever.

I'm gutted that I cannot buy it and play it. It's being released on both PS4 and PS5 platforms, and no upgrade path is available. There is no 'PS5 Upgrade Available' notice on the PS4 cover, and even the PS Store states that if you want both, you must buy the Deluxe version costing an eye-watering £74.99. I prefer physical copies. I'll buy the odd bargain in the online store, but for the most part, I want to keep what I buy after the inevitable server shutdowns in the future.

So what can I do? I can't buy the PS5 version as I don't have a PS5 console yet, and I won't buy any new PS4 games that I can't play on my future PS5. I can't help but think that 2K Games haven't thought this through properly. They're losing out on a day-one sale (which isn't far off from my birthday) to a PS5 sale item in a couple of years. There are still a lot of us who haven't upgraded to the current generation, you know?







# HOW [AND WHY] I LEARNED TO PLAY VIDEO GAMES WITH ONE HAND



Above: Paul demonstrating his control method on the PS4.

**IN HIS FIRST ARTICLE FOR FUSION PAUL TWIST EXPLAINS HOW HE'S TAKEN THE CONTROL(LER) BACK AFTER EXPERIENCING A TRAGEDY**

■ I've played video games since the mid-1980s when I inherited a hand-me-down Vic20 and a joystick from an Atari 2600. I'd been happily using both hands to play video games ever since. That is, until 2014.

So, what happened in 2014? Did I realise I was so damn good at games that playing them using both hands no longer posed a significant challenge to me? Ha! Hardly! I love games, but I've never been the best at most of them. Did I suddenly discover a passion for hentai games and need my other hand for "sensory stimulation"? No, nothing so vulgar, thankfully. In 2014, I suffered a hemorrhagic stroke at age 35, resulting in the loss of the use of both of my left limbs. At the time, I remember half-joking to my wife that I'd rather lose the use of my leg than my arm because even if I could no longer walk, at least I'd still be able to play video games. As



it turned out, I never would walk again, but I would still play games, albeit with one hand.

I'd been planning on getting a PlayStation 4 not long after its launch, but my new physical limitations put me off splashing out that much cash. I wasn't sure I'd even be able to enjoy gaming anymore. After a little online research on playing games with one hand, I learned that there were one-handed gamers who played with a standard DualShock 4 controller, so eventually, for Christmas 2016, I bought a PS4.

Learning to play PS4 games with one hand was much easier than I had first anticipated. I tend to play most games on the easiest available difficulty setting, as it stands to reason that I'm already at a disadvantage to most gamers, having to play games designed to be played with both hands using just one hand. I've found that rather than using my thumbs, like I used to, and as most, if not all, two-handed players do, I now use my forefinger and little finger on the controller. The only time I encounter problems when using this method of playing games is if a game makes extensive use of triggers and shoulder buttons. One genre of game I have not managed to play successfully on the PS4 is first-person shooters. However, this has been no great loss for me, as I was never the biggest fan of the genre in the first place. I was always rubbish at them, even with two hands, but I found them impossible to play enjoyably with one hand.

I'm aware that there are potential one-handed options for the PlayStation 4 that I am yet to try, such as customising the controls at a global level using the Accessibility menu or purchasing a modded controller, but these are not widely available. Nor are they cheap. I think a modded controller

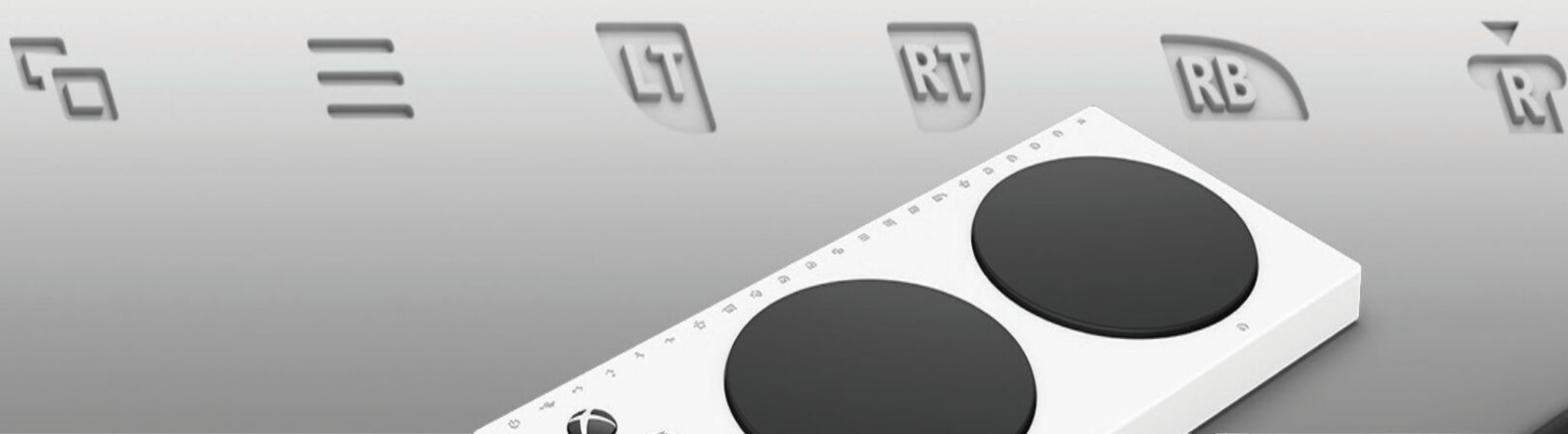


is probably a step too far for me, as I've found I can play to a level that works for me using a standard DualShock 4 and default button mapping.

Finding that I could play PS4 games and enjoy them, I finally got around to picking up a Nintendo Switch in 2018, handily paid for entirely by Amazon vouchers received on my 40th birthday. To my surprise, the Switch was even more playable with one hand than the PS4. Sadly, the handheld mode is entirely off-limits, but in docked mode, or even using the kickstand, I've found that using the joycons in the included cradle provides a great way to play Switch games with one hand. Being smaller and flatter than the Dual Shock 4 controller seems to help somewhat too. Similar to the PS4, things can get trickier when shoulder buttons or triggers come into play. However, on *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*, I've found that tapping the shoulder button to use items is a satisfactory solution. The motion control aspect of *Super Mario Odyssey* proved slightly fiddly with one hand but not insurmountable. *Switch Sports* has proved to be an absolute joy to play with







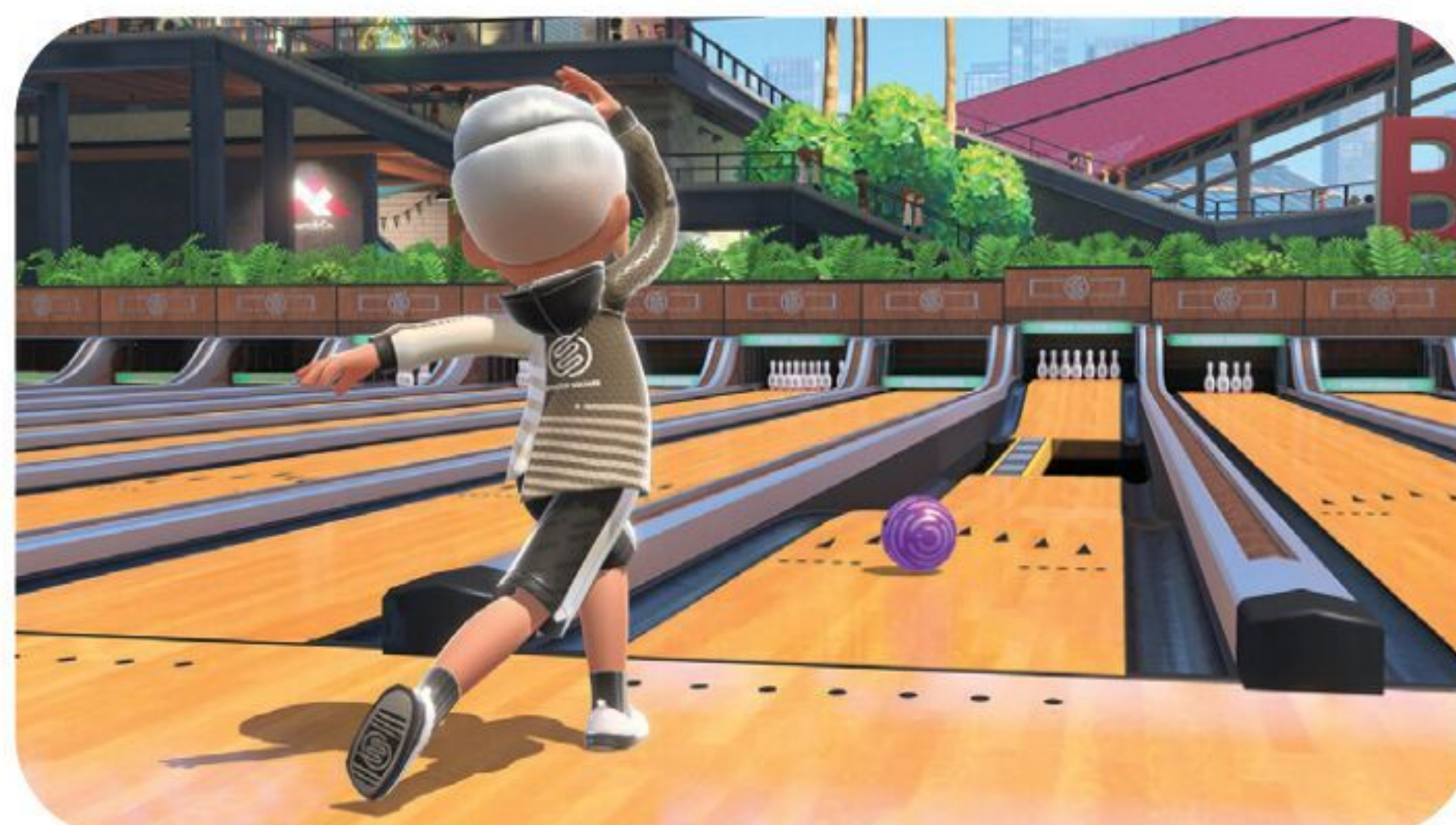
**Above:** The highly customisable Xbox Adaptive Controller.

one hand, with one notable exception: football. Football's reliance on swiping one joycon to kick while moving using the thumb-stick on the other is just about possible to do with one hand, but it renders the sport no fun to play (at least for me.) Luckily, all the other sports play flawlessly using one joycon, making *Switch Sports* an almost perfect one-handed game!

As for Xbox gaming, with one hand - I do not (yet) own an Xbox, but I hope to be acquiring a Series S in the not-too-distant future. I plan to play with one hand using a standard controller, just as I do on the PS4 and Switch, but should I find this too cumbersome, I may consider investing in Xbox's adaptive controller. I must give props to Microsoft for making their adaptive controller widely available. Even if I do not need it, I'm pleased it's an option for those who benefit from it. It probably helps that most of the games I prefer tend to be relatively simple. For example, I've sunk over 700 hours into *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. The slow pace and relaxed gameplay suit playing with one hand nicely.

So, that's how (and why) I learned to play games with one hand. If you'd like to learn more about playing video games with one hand, you can find Start Player Onehand, my blog reviewing games from a one-handed perspective, at <https://medium.com/@startplayeronehand>

If there are more single-handed players out there in Fusionland, I'd love to hear from you. And I bet I can still beat some of you two-handers at *Street Fighter* games - "Hadooooo-Ken!"



**Above:** Switch games that work well with Paul's one-handed control method (from top) - *Mario Kart 8*, *Switch Sports*, and *Animal Crossing New Horizons*.



# METAL SLUG



RETRO FAITH GRABS THE  
HEAVY MACHINE GUN AND  
PREPARES TO DESTROY THE  
TARGET AS SHE REVISITS THE  
BIRTH OF SNK'S ENDURING  
SERIES. MISSION START!



■ Arcades in the mid-90s were going through an evolution. Many publishers looked to jump on the 3D bandwagon with slick polygon-fuelled releases. It felt like the time of the 2D-pixel game was up as we were blasted with realistic-looking visuals and new ways to play. Looking back, it felt like the future was upon us, and our games were changing forever. However, SNK had other ideas and had no intention of dropping its Neo Geo hardware in favour of fancy graphics. In 1996 they published a traditional side-scrolling shooter, the mighty *Metal Slug: Super Vehicle-001*.

There is something incredibly satisfying in blasting through hordes of Nazi-esque soldiers with massive weapons and a tank. And in a nutshell, that is what *Metal Slug* is giving you. Marco and Tarma, two tough-as-nails elite troops, are taking on the Rebel Army to

thwart its take-over of the world. The story and overall setting are very comical, and throughout the entire game, developer Nazca Corporation pokes fun at the Rebel Army. Situations like catching them off guard or dropping things on them imply that they're incompetent and out of their depth.

The charm these little set pieces create is wonderful and genuine humour in video games, especially in a run 'n' gun title, is indeed a rare occurrence. It was as though Nazca and SNK were defying the new 3D revolution, and this plays out in *Metal Slug*'s story, and humour, as the New World Order's Rebel Army is taken down. As the gaming landscape shifted towards realism and tried to be taken seriously as an entertainment medium, *Metal Slug* stuck to its guns. Its over-the-top gameplay reminded arcade dwellers that games are meant to be fun.

SNK would have felt smug at the decision to keep going with the Neo Geo as *Metal Slug* was one of 1996's highest-grossing arcade







games. It was so popular that it spawned four sequels that all used that same game engine and hardware. It's also a testament to how the gamers themselves still wanted to see beautifully animated pixels. They were happy chucking 20p pieces into these games when *Tekken*, *Daytona* and *Virtua Cop* tried to steal the show. Of course, this is all just nostalgia as pixel-art never went away, and the 2D games we all know and love are thriving to this day.

*Metal Slug* still plays well today. Even with its tough arcade difficulty, nothing can take away from the satisfaction of clearing a level in one credit. It has everything: great artwork, pulsating chiptune soundtrack and expertly designed gameplay. Like many games in the run 'n' gun genre, it's short-lived. Expert players will sail through its six missions in record time. However, *Metal Slug* is also the kind of game you can return to time and again. It's just pure arcade fun and takes everything great about the genre and adds dollops more.

*Metal Slug* also made its way out of the arcade. The definitive port is the Neo Geo

AES version which is an exact copy of the arcade board and is now highly sought after by collectors. The Neo Geo CD, PlayStation, and Saturn versions added extra content, such as record keeping and a story-based mission mode. All these versions were cut down from the original, missing animation frames and other graphics so the hardware could handle the game's pace. And sadly, none of these home ports, except the AES cart, made it out of Japan.

*Metal Slug* is alive and well today as almost every modern gaming platform has it available in some form. Its legacy is of sheer resilience and defiance in the face of changing tides. Also, its impact on the run 'n' gun genre should not be understated. Play any modern title in the genre, and many use the control and combat systems seen within *Metal Slug*. Even the art style has been reused, with many scrolling platform shooters looking to replicate the magic by paying homage. *Metal Slug* is a special game and a classic retro blaster for the ages.



# SUPER STAGES

## Special

**WE RETURN TO THE WORLD OF DRAGONS AS GEORGE STURGEON CONTINUES HIS DISCUSSION WITH PRODUCER MICHAEL JOHN ABOUT THE LEVEL DESIGN OF THE *SPYRO THE DRAGON* SERIES**

■ Forging on in our quest to shine a spotlight on the wonderful work of devoted game developers, we conclude our first Super Stages Special feature with this final instalment. Michael John and I talk about everything from jazz musicians to the scrapped concepts for the final world of the original *Spyro The Dragon*. We also hear Michael's thoughts on the level design processes and the lessons he learned from creating the games' stages as he breaks them down from a teaching professor's perspective.

**George Sturgeon:** Can you detail any level(s) that presented the biggest challenge to the team during production and why?

**Michael John:** In the *Spyro* games, whenever we tried to make the levels more open, it got very challenging to keep the framerate up, and manage visibility issues. I would say that in some ways Aquaria Towers was an example of a level that was just kind of crazy to try, and made life very hard on the artists and engineers. But, it did



make for a cool attract mode sequence.

**GS:** Aquaria Towers is a very open and complex level, almost entirely vertical, and it shifts between dry land and underwater styles of gameplay. Having replayed it, I can see why it was challenging to design, and from a player's perspective, you have to keep re-evaluating your position within the stage and working out where to go next. The theme of progressing in



# Developer Interview Part 2

**Game:** Spyro The Dragon

**System:** Playstation

**Year:** 1998

**Developer:** Insomniac Games

**Producer:** Michael John



an upwards fashion is present throughout all three of the *Spyro* games that the team worked on, and it's a concept that they pull off remarkably well. In your view, what are the essentials required to craft a great stage?

**MJ:** "Craft" is a great word for the process of level design. It's a process, and honouring it as a process is the most important thing. I have my own process, and I teach it in my university

classes, but it's by no means perfect. Personally, I want to know before I start; what is this place? Who lives here? What is the "problem" of the place that the player will engage with? How will it change? Then from there, there's this process of translating this story into space, which is just iteration and imagination, and a whole lot of time. I used to say jokingly that every stage I designed took three months off my lifespan because it just felt that difficult and stressful. Now that I'm older, I hope that is not true!

I also think there's just so much you can learn by studying architecture. A key reference book is *Architecture: Form Space and Order* by Francis Ching. It details many tools that are incredibly useful to designers, and teaches you about things like foreshadowing or weenies (landmarks), how to use sound and motion to draw the player's attention, and then how to use those same tricks to create surprise, jump-scares, or ambushes. I feel like I could go on forever about this because it's such a wonderful field of knowledge.

**GS:** When you look at video games purely as a means of entertainment, I think it's so easy to forget that what you're playing is a finished product that may have taken months or even years of hard work to complete. Those months of work can include an incredible array of tasks such as storyboarding, architectural studies, and travelling to locations to find inspiration for level design. Leading me back to *Spyro*, the designers





on the team at the time had to draw level designs on sheets of graph paper, and years later the team at Toys For Bob couldn't source the original level geometry for the *Spyro Reignited Trilogy*, so they created their own "SpyroScope" engine to map out the world of the game as it ran through an emulator. It's inspiring to see how the craft of level design evolves over time, and how each team overcomes the challenges they encounter.

**GS:** Secrets are a great way for designers to add longevity and replay value to their games, whilst also helping to make them memorable. Can you tell us one of your favourite secrets?

**MJ:** The *Spyro* trilogy has a lot of content (depending on how you count, as many as 100 levels), so there is ample opportunity for secrets. One thing I recently noticed, which I had forgotten, is that a number of the baby dragons in *Spyro III* are named after jazz musicians.

**GS:** I've always been amazed by games that give large groups of characters lots of unique names and animations. Little flourishes like these, along

with hidden secrets, are always appreciated and show that the developers are passionate about the game. These secrets underline that the team at Insomniac must have enjoyed being creative, and had fun coming up with the individual baby dragon names throughout development. During the development of the game, which level stood out as a model of reference for the rest of the game's stage design? Can you elaborate and tell us what you and the team learned from it?

**MJ:** Much of the original development of the *Spyro* games occurred in the level now known as Stone Hill. I remember a lot of enemy behaviour was fine-tuned in that level, along with Spyro's movement. What I recollect about the level design, especially after re-playing the game, is how different bits of the level kept emerging when asking questions like; what if you drop down a well? Or, what if you jump over this cliff? Exploring the possibilities of the space ended up being one of the fundamental cornerstones of *Spyro* level design, and I'd say Stone Hill was the level where that was fully developed.





**GS:** Where better to explore *Spyro*'s potential as an open-area platformer than in the lush green expanse of Stone Hill? The open design lends itself well to exploration and experimentation, not only as a tutorial level for players but also serving the same purpose for the design team as well. I'm pretty sure many of us roasted our first sheep in that level. Were there levels from other games or previous ones that your team had created that helped to influence the stage design of later projects?

**MJ:** The whole game was deeply influenced by *Super Mario 64*, which almost stood alone as the game model. However, due to both technology and design, Mario's levels tended to be much more open and also tended to rely more on things like moving platforms. In time, with the addition of features like loop-backs, and lots of foreshadowing via gems, *Spyro*'s levels ended up being something different.

**GS:** The revelation that *Spyro the Dragon* used *Super Mario 64* as a reference is a surprise. Even with the knowledge that *Super Mario 64* was a ground-breaking title for three-dimensional video game worlds, I'm not sure many would make

the connection as they ended up being two very different experiences. Both are amazing in their own way. Can you recall any noteworthy stages or sections within a level that were removed during development, that you wish had been included in the final release?

**MJ:** Everyone seems to ask this question and I actually don't remember much. I remember that there was certainly a plan to do more with Gnorc Gnexus for instance, but I don't think it was ever actually designed. I do plan to go back through some of the notes I've discovered recently and see what more there may have been.

**GS:** Scrapped content is always of interest to fans who want more from their favourite video games. I guess we are always wondering whether that cut piece would have been worth keeping. As simple as it may be, I've always enjoyed the hub world approach taken by games like *Spyro*, *Crash Bandicoot*, and many others. Although Gnorc Gnexus as a hub world may not have been fully realised, the less expansive layout that it ended up being is still hugely enjoyable, and the levels it hosts are some of the game's toughest challenges. Which level,





section, or prototype was the first to be created by the team and how did this initial design influence the rest of the game?

**MJ:** There are a couple of answers to this question. The first was that much of the early development of *Spyro* was done in the lush green spaces of Artisans and in particular the Artisan's home, and what became Stone Hill. These levels were more tests of movement and importantly, they didn't bring out the glide very much.

Then we built a test level that was a mountain level, which you'd probably recognise as what would become Magic Crafters. This became the demo that we showed to Sony and had some very long glides. Some trivia for you - the demo video we showed had the song 'Take California' by Propellerheads as a soundtrack. It worked very well.

**GS:** The Artisan's homeworld seems to be as significant to developers as it became for the fans upon the game's release. It served as a test bed for the developers, and eventually became the tutorial level for players. Where would the purple dragon be without his signature glide? It appears that we have both the Artisans and Magic Crafters worlds to thank for shaping *Spyro*'s mechanics early on in development. What were the reactions from people that tested the game and its levels? What feedback did you receive?

**MJ:** We playtested *Spyro* so much, and I just loved that part of the process. I was fortunate

to be the person most often sent to Foster City, where Sony's HQ was at the time. I'd stay for several days in a hotel and just watch playtests all day long. It sounds kind of dull but it was absolutely the best thing.

We had a lot of kids playtesting, and I still remember their names and their personalities. Mick and Kim were a brother/sister pair who tested all three games in the *Spyro* trilogy. There was a kid named Dan who was a speedrunner, and it was great learning by watching him play. We made so many tweaks and changes based on what we learned from these playtests and I think everyone should do that when making games.

**GS:** Playing a game as a developer is likely to be an entirely different experience from playing the game as a consumer. It must be so uplifting to see the reactions of those people who play what you've designed. Seeing people enjoy the world that you've crafted is the pay-off that makes all the hard work worthwhile.

This *Spyro* adventure may have reached its end, but we must extend a big thank you to Michael John for taking the time to answer all of these burning questions about the beloved series that he helped bring to life. Without his input, this huge feature wouldn't have been possible - Thank you!

We hope you'll join us in the future issues of Fusion Magazine for more developer-led specials and continue to enjoy more Super Stages.





**WITH MANY GAMES FROM NINTENDO'S BACK CATALOGUE NOW AVAILABLE VIA THE SWITCH ONLINE SERVICE, RETRO FAITH LOOKS AT HOW THE KYOTO GIANT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS EMULATION HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS**

■ Nintendo's retro revival has started to gather pace recently, with NES, SNES and N64 emulators on the Switch offering many old titles. It seems Nintendo has embraced the benefits of allowing access to its older titles in an accessible way. Gone are the days when gamers scoff at Nintendo and the lack of back catalogue releases. And while the solution isn't perfect, the future certainly looks bright for those wanting a retro Nintendo fix on their Switch. However, it's been a bumpy road to this point, and the story started over twenty years ago.

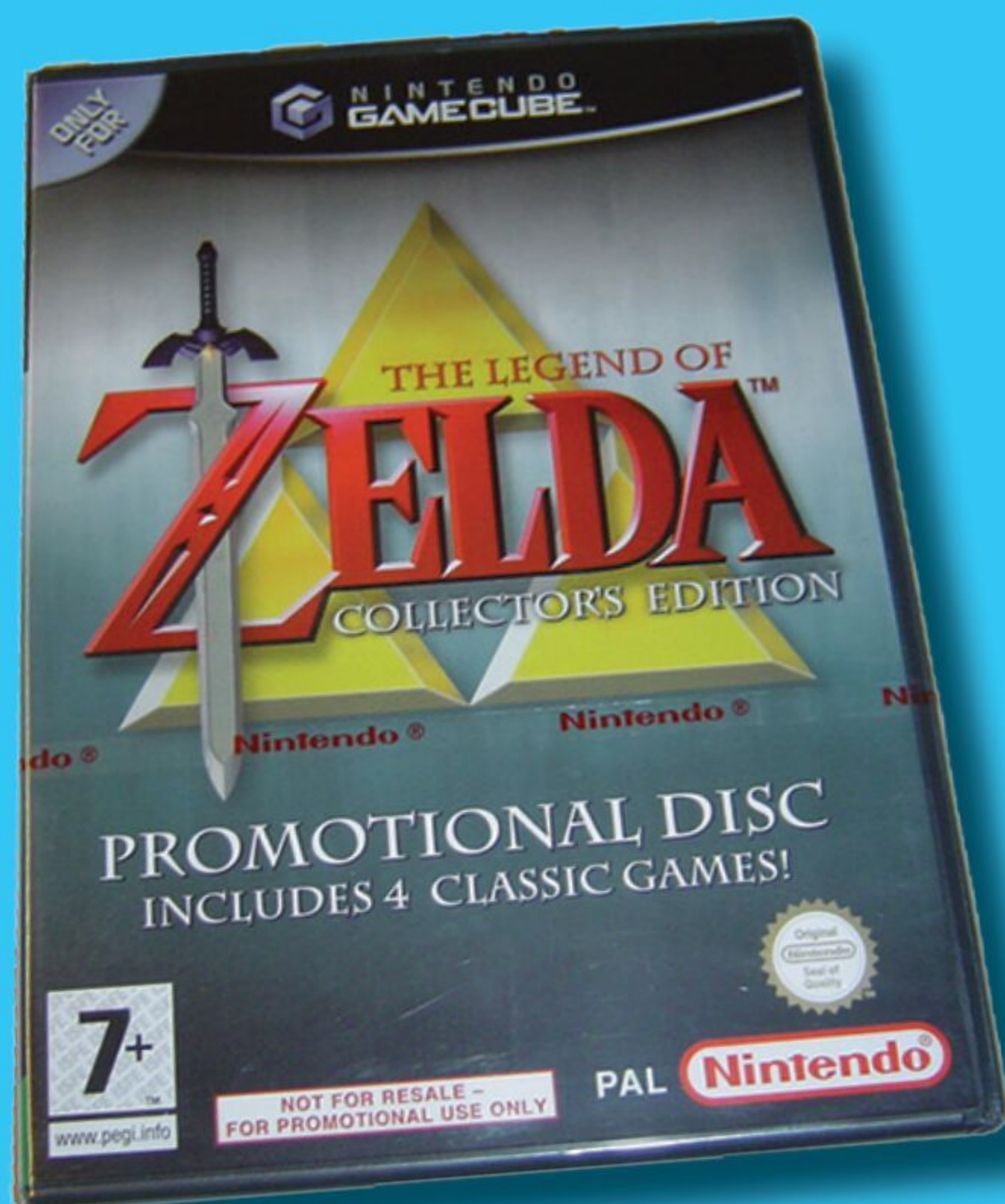
At the turn of the century, free emulators capable of playing 8-bit, 16-bit and 32-bit games became popular on PCs. Many gamers turned their backs

on traditional consoles in favour of free versions of systems from Nintendo, Sega, Atari, and a host of other consoles. The software allows you to play downloaded ROMs created from cartridges, floppy disks and CDs. This method gives users all the games for a system without owning the original hardware or software. While this may be appealing, it's not technically legal as the copyright holder doesn't receive any revenue from a game sale.

Game publishers, especially Nintendo, have since used aggressive legal tactics to stop websites from sharing emulators and related ROMs. However, if done correctly, there's lots of money to be made from emulation. Nintendo began finding ways to offer old games to the market with the Game Boy Advance. A steady flow of NES originals and SNES classics was released on carts with improvements and save features. Also, Nintendo released a compilation of classic *Zelda* games for GameCube that was included free with consoles and game purchases.

While successful, these budget titles and freebies were never going to be enough to encourage gamers to give up their free emulators.





Above: The *Zelda* Collector's Edition for the GameCube.



Above: Sadly, Nintendo closed the Wii Shop in 2019.

Below: The NES Mini and games featured on the SNES Mini.

It would take Nintendo's best-selling console to open up legal emulation possibilities. When the Wii Shop Channel launched in 2006, Nintendo began a journey to bring its back catalogue to its new platform. The service was also opened up to other developers, past and present. With the help of Sega, NEC, SNK and others, hundreds of classic games appeared for download on Wii.

This strategy worked well for Nintendo. Millions of downloads followed, and the service's popularity sparked Sony and Microsoft to offer similar services on their platforms. For retro fans, this created a world of convenience, as they no longer needed to keep old systems set up. They now had a menu filled with games from various systems such as NES, Mega Drive and Neo Geo, all in one place. However, unlike the emulators of the 1990s, gamers were now paying for content, which pleased Nintendo as the sales rolled in.

During this time, Nintendo tried another tactic to satisfy the need with two dedicated mini-consoles of the NES and SNES. Both were little emulation machines taking the shape of the old console that sold out on release. Each one contained about 25 different games, from Nintendo classics to a couple of lesser-known titles. The devices not only sold well but proved to show the desire for these kinds of products, and it sparked many companies, including Sega and Sony, to do the same. However, the hackers found a way to break the software and once again fill them with ROMs.

Following the closure of the original Wii Shop in 2019, Nintendo continued to offer the games on its eShop for 3DS and WiiU. The entire service is ending now, but Nintendo continues







Above: In 2022, emulation is big business for the big N.



Above: Ocarina of Time running on Switch Online.

to target the retro crowd with its latest console. It started by releasing several emulators on Switch, and gamers can enjoy NES, SNES and N64 titles directly. Before, gamers would buy individual games but now have access to a library of original Nintendo ROMs played through an emulator portal.

There is a catch to the service; it's only available through purchasing a Nintendo Switch Online membership. These can be taken monthly, quarterly or annually, with the latter being the best value for money. The price is similar to buying about four or five titles on the old eShop. However, you could keep those individual purchases without needing a rolling membership. Also, this solution only offers a selection of games and fails to use the entire back catalogue, so it's no surprise that ROM sites remain popular today.

However we look at it, Nintendo does seem to be coming round to the idea that to compete with the free emulator crowd, they have to

offer something alternative. It's now taking fans seriously by offering legal ways to play its old games. Nintendo is also reaching bigger and, more importantly, younger audiences with its approach. Many new gamers will be enjoying *Mario* and *Donkey Kong* for the first time. It's some turnaround for Nintendo, from angry lawyers taking legal action to actually offering a solution to the problem. Long may Nintendo's retro revival continue.





REVIEW

ASTEROIDS RX

SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM

# ASTEROIDS

RX

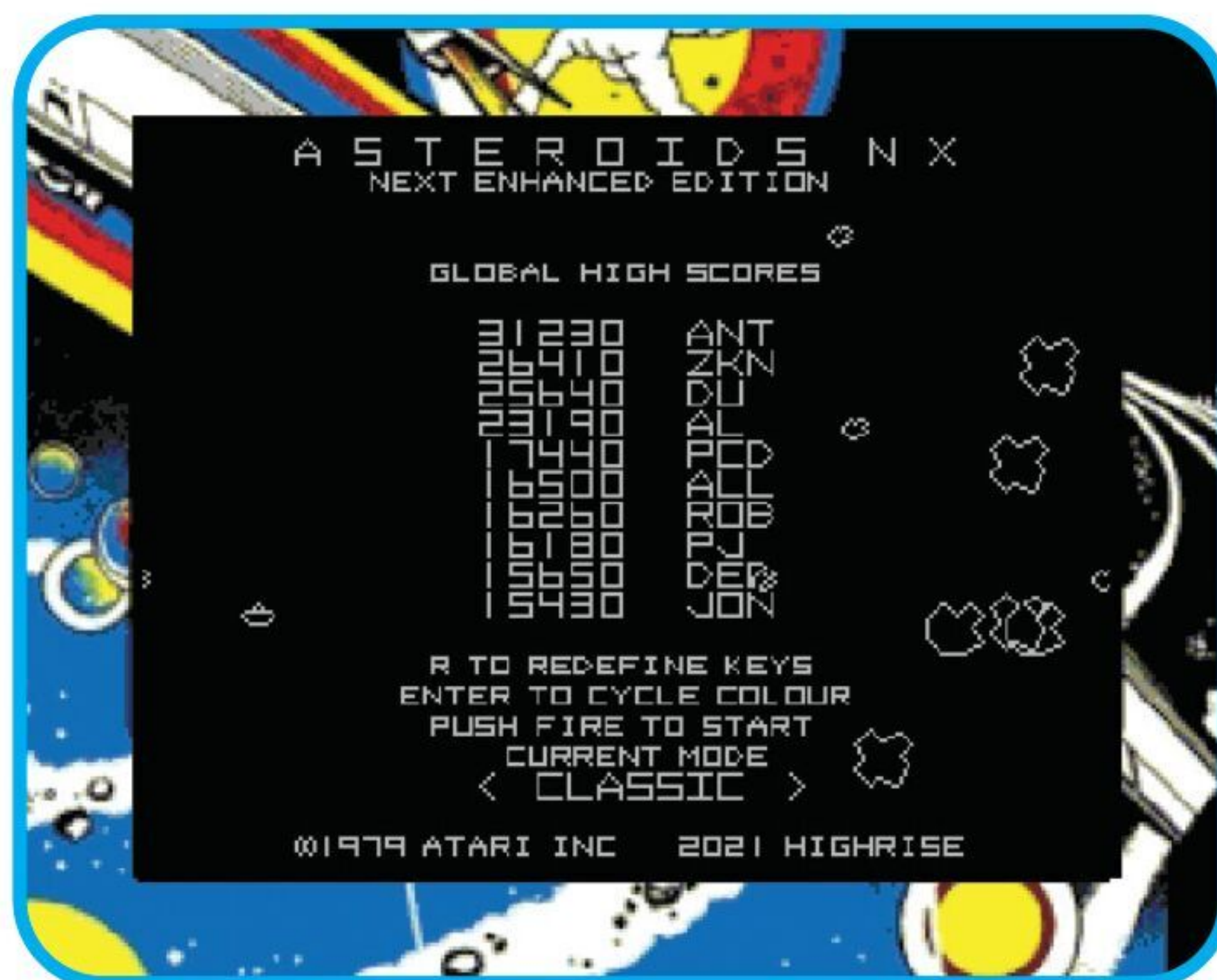
# A FAITHFUL ARCADE CONVERSION OF *ASTEROIDS* HAS FINALLY LANDED ON THE SPECTRUM AND CERI ROBERTS IS ON HAND TO TAKE A LOOK AT THIS HOMEBREW PROJECT

**■ The *Asteroids* arcade game epitomised the “easy to learn, difficult to master” philosophy of game design that seemed to be everywhere in the early days of the arcades. It was all about that addictive gameplay.**

*Asteroids* was Atari's response to Taito's monster hit, *Space Invaders*. It had that same simple, but addictive gameplay trait, and Atari shifted an impressive 75,000 units of the game, its biggest selling cabinet to date.

Home conversions were inevitable; given the graphics' simplistic look, hopes were high. Surely the 8-bits of the time could manage this? It could be the most elusive of things; an Arcade-perfect conversion. And yet, and yet....

Only two good versions would land on the 8-bit computers and consoles. *Meteors* on the BBC Micro and *Moons of Jupiter* on the Vic20 were both very playable *Asteroids* clones, but that was about it. You'd think that there must surely be some good examples of the genre within the Spectrum's vast library of games, but this is not the case. The best example is *Planetoids* from Psion; all the other *Asteroids* clones seemed to suffer significant issues. Poor movement of the asteroids, poor rotation and inertia of the ship affected how it could be controlled; all very disappointing. The little Spectrum had a distinct lack of *Asteroids*. However, that



has all been put right with the release of *Asteroids RX* by Highriser.

*Asteroids RX* is the arcade-perfect conversion we have been looking for. It is, in fact, a conversion of two games – *Asteroids* and *Asteroids Deluxe*. The difference between the two is largely down to hyperspace in the former versus





shield in the latter. I prefer the anarchic nature of the hyper-space personally, but both play well.

The controls are tight, and the ship's movement is smooth, with the inertia feeling just right. The graphics mimic the vectors well, and whilst there are fewer asteroids on screen than in the arcade version, the screen size is smaller, so it works. If you wish to, you can cycle the game through different colours by pressing Enter. You haven't lived until you've played *Asteroids* in Cyan.

Written by the very talented Allan Turvey (of *Bruce Lee RX* and *Jetpac RX* fame), this looks, sounds, and plays superbly. This fantastic piece of coding fills a gap in the Spectrum's library with style. I'm off to have yet another game of *Asteroids* RX while I patiently wait for *Blasteroids* RX.



**FUSION  
REACTION**

**10**





# FUSION



Game : **Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero**  
Year : **1997**  
System : **PlayStation, Nintendo 64**  
Words : **Retro Faith**

■ Sometimes a game series takes a backward step, which is undoubtedly the case for *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*. After the almighty success of the first three one-on-one fighting games and the mega mix that was the *Mortal Kombat* trilogy, Midway decided to start an origins series. The idea seems like a good one, take the popular *Mortal Kombat* characters, give them a back story, and put them into a scrolling action game. The first featured fan favourite, Sub-Zero, on a mission to find an amulet and destroy his rivals before the first game's events.

On paper, it should have been a hole-in-one, considering the series' popularity at that point and Sub-Zero being a particularly loved character. However, once you start playing, it becomes evident quite quickly that this would not be the incredible ride we hoped for. Actually, it's as if the character and enemies are frozen at times due to the awkward animation and awful-looking graphics. You can forgive a game having poor presentation if the gameplay is top-notch, but all you do is fight a barrage of generic-looking henchmen with basic attacks.

As if things couldn't get any worse, the platforming and level layouts are infuriating. Sometimes you just have to jump and hope you will land safely while traps appear out of nowhere. When you get to the boss characters, things start to look up, but the tedious gameplay and cut-rate graphics have already taken their toll. It's a shame that a series that had hit after hit should suddenly fail, but Midway somehow managed it.









*For all your Retro news!*



**FUSIONRGAMER.COM**

